MARY·WARE

The LITTLE COLONEL'S CHUM

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Nancy P. Smith

To Lucille J. Pelouze,
With Love & best wishes,
From,
Aunt Belle.

Xmas 1908.

MARY WARE

THE LITTLE COLONEL'S CHUM

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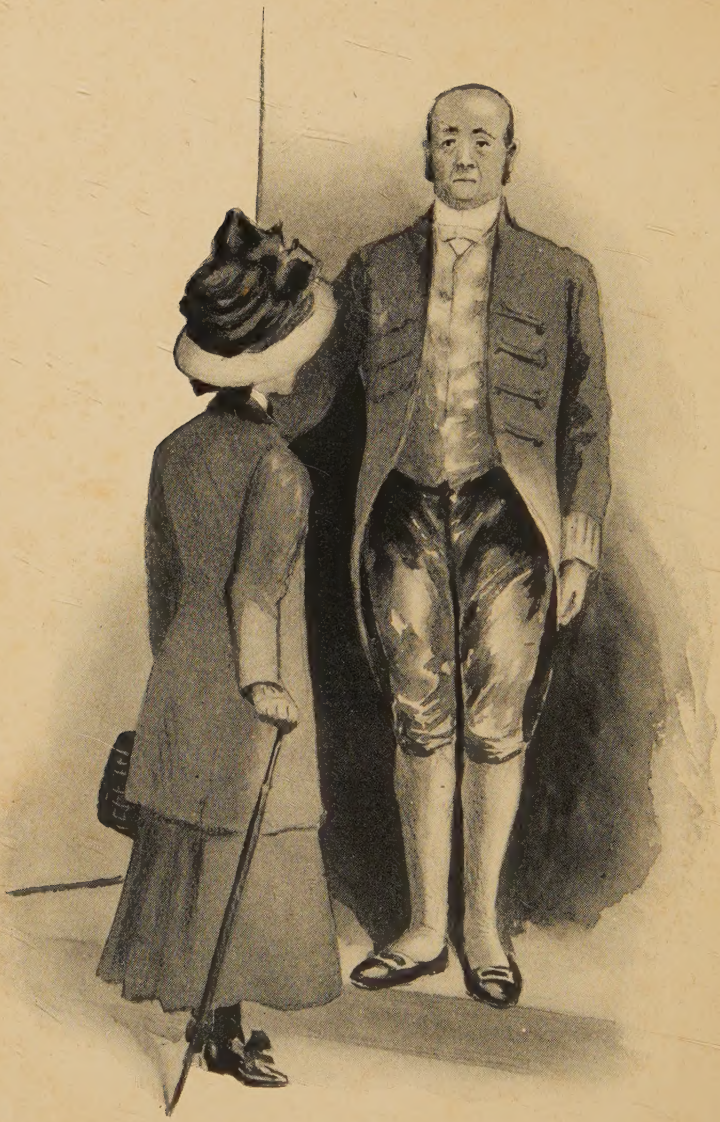

"HER KEEN GRAY EYES SWEPT HIM ONE QUICK LOOK."

(*See page 4*)

Mary Ware

The Little Colonel's Chum

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Big Brother," "Ole Mammy's Torment," "Joel: A Boy of Galilee," "Asa Holmes," etc.

Illustrated by ETHELDRED B. BARRY

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TO

M. G. J

Preface

Dear Boys and Girls Who Are Old Friends of the Little Colonel:

When I finished the eighth volume of the Little Colonel Stories, The Maid of Honour, I thought I had reached the end of the series, but such a flood of letters came pouring in demanding to know what happened next, that I could not ignore such a plea, and in consequence The Little Colonel's Knight came riding by.

But even with Lloyd married and "living happily ever after" her friends were not satisfied. "You skipped" they complained by the hundreds. "You never told what happened between the time of her engagement and the wedding, and you never told what happened to Betty and Joyce and Mary and Phil and all the rest of them. Even if you haven't time for another book, couldn't you just please write *me* a little letter and satisfy my curiosity about each character."

Of course I couldn't begin granting all those requests, and finally I was persuaded it would be easier to answer your questions with a new book. So here is Mary Ware, taking up the thread of the story at the first of the skipped places. The time is September, the same September that Betty went away to Warwick Hall to teach and Lloyd began to prepare for her début in Louisville.

Now this volume covers only one short year, so of course it can not tell you all you want to know. But if you are disappointed because it does not take you to the final milestone, remember that had we gone that far it would have been the end of all our journeying together. And we have it from our *Tusitala* himself, that best beloved of travellers, for whom in a far island of the sea was dug "a Road to last for ever," that *"to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."*

A. F. J.

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MARY WARE
THE LITTLE COLONEL'S CHUM

CHAPTER I

MARY ENTERS WARWICK HALL

The 'bus running between Warwick Hall Station and Warwick Hall school drew up at the door of the great castle-like building with as grand a flourish as if it carried the entire Senior class, and deposited one lone passenger upon the steps. As it was several days before the opening of the Fall term, no pupils were expected so soon, and but few of the teachers had returned. There was no one to see the imposing arrival of the little Freshman except the butler, who had been drawn to the front window by the sound of wheels. It devolved on him to answer the knocker this afternoon. In the general confusion of house-cleaning the man who attended the door had been sent up stairs to hang curtains.

That the newcomer was a prospective pupil, Hawkins saw at a glance. He had not been in Madam Chartley's service all these years without learning a few things. That she was over-awed by the magnificence of her surroundings he readily guessed, for she made no movement towards the knocker, only stood and looked timidly up at the massive portal and then across the lawn, where a line of haughty peacocks stood drawn up in gorgeous dress parade on the highest terrace.

"She's feeling like a cat in a strange garret," said the butler to himself with a grin. It was a matter of personal pride with him when strangers seemed duly impressed by the grandeur of this aristocratic old manor-house, now used as a boarding-school. It was a personal affront when they were not. Needless to say his dignity had suffered much at the hands of American school-girls, and although this one seemed impressed by her surroundings almost to the point of panic, he eyed her suspiciously.

"'Eaven knows they lose their shyness soon henough!" he said under his breath. "She can just cool 'er 'eels on the doorstep till she gets courage to knock. 'Twull do 'er good."

But she waited so long that he began to grow

uneasy. After that first glance she had turned her back on the door as if she repented coming, and, satchel in hand, stood hesitating on the top step ready for flight. At least that is the way Hawkins interpreted her attitude. He could not see her face.

It was a plain little face, sunburned as a gypsy's, with a generous sprinkling of freckles on her inquisitive nose. But it was a lovable face, happy and eager, with a sweet mouth and alert gray eyes that seemed to see to the bottom of everything. Sometimes its expression made it almost beautiful. This was one of the times.

She was not gazing regretfully after the departed 'bus as Hawkins surmised, but with a pleasure so keen that it fairly made her catch her breath, she was looking at the strange landscape and recognizing places here and there, made familiar by kodak pictures, and the enthusiastic descriptions of old pupils. There was the long flight of marble steps leading down the stately terraces to the river — the beautiful willow-fringed Potomac. There was the pergola overhung with Abbotsford ivy, and the wonderful old garden with the sun-dial, and the rhododendrons from Killarney. She had heard so much about this place that it had grown

to be a sort of enchanted land of dreams to her, and now the thought that she was actually here in the midst of it made her draw in her breath with a delicious little shiver.

Hawkins, from his peep-hole through one of the mullioned sidelights of the great entrance, to which he had now advanced, saw the shiver, and misinterpreting it, suddenly opened the door. It gave her such a start, so absorbed had she been in her surroundings, that she almost toppled down the steps. But the next instant it was Hawkins who was having the start. Unabashed by his pompous manner, her keen gray eyes swept him one quick look from his sphinx-like face to his massive shoe-buckles, as if she had been given some strange botanical specimen to label and classify. Without an instant's hesitation she exclaimed in the tone of one making a delightful discovery, "Why, it's *Hawkins!*"

It was positively uncanny to the man that this stranger on whom he had never laid eyes before should call him by name. He wondered if she were one of these new-fangled mind-readers he had been hearing so much about. It was also upsetting to find that he had been mistaken about her delay in knocking. There was anything but timidity in the

grand air with which she gave him her card, saying, "Announce me to Madam Chartley, Hawkins."

She was a plump little body, ill adapted to stately airs and graces, but she had been rehearsing this entrance mentally for days, and she swept into the reception room as if she were the daughter of a duke.

"There!" she said to herself as the portières dropped behind her. "I hope he was properly impressed." Then catching sight of her reflection in a long mirror opposite, she wilted into an attitude of abject despair. A loop of milliner's wire, from which the ribbon had slipped, stood up stiff and straight in the bow on her hat. She proceeded to put it back in place with anxious pats and touches, exclaiming in an anguished whisper,

"Oh, *why* is it, that whenever I feel particularly imposing and Queen Annish inside, I always look so dishevelled and Mary Annish outside! Here's my hat cocked over one eye and my hair straggling out in wisps like a crazy thing. I wonder what Hawkins thought."

Hawkins, on his way up stairs was spelling out the name on the card he carried. "Miss Mary Ware, Phœnix, Arizona."

"Humph!" was his mental exclamation. "From

one of the jumping hoff places." Then his mind reverted to the several detective tales that made up his knowledge of the far West. " 'Ope she doesn't carry a gun 'idden hon 'er person."

Now that the first ordeal was over and she was safely inside the doors of Warwick Hall, the new pupil braced herself for the next one, the meeting with Madam Chartley. She wouldn't have been quite so nervous over it if she had been sure of a welcome, but the catalogue stated distinctly that no pupils could be received before the fifteenth of September, and this was only the twelfth. She had the best of reasons for coming ahead of time, and was sure that Madam Chartley would make an exception in her case when once the matter was properly explained. The friends in whose care she had travelled from Phœnix had expected to spend several days in Washington, sight-seeing, and she was to have been their guest until the opening of school. But a telegram met them calling them immediately to Boston. She couldn't stay alone at a strange hotel, she knew no one in the entire city, and there was no course open to her but to come on to school.

It was easy enough for her to see why she might not be welcome. There was a vigorous washing of windows going on over the whole establishment,

a sound of carpenters in the background and a smell of fresh paint and furniture polish to the fore. Everything was out of its usual orbit in the process of getting ready for the opening day.

Lying awake the night before in the upper berth of the hot Pullman car, Mary had carefully planned her little speech of explanation, and had rehearsed it a dozen times since. But now her heart was beating so fast and her throat was so dry she knew the words would stick at the very time she needed them most. Feeling as if she were about to have a tooth pulled, she sank into a large upholstered rocking chair to wait. It tipped back so far that her toes could not reach the floor, and she sprang out again in a hurry. One could never feel at ease in an infantile position like that.

Then she tried a straight chair, imitating the pose of a majestic gentlewoman in one of the portraits on the panelled wall. It was one of Madam's grand ancestors she conjectured. A glance into the tell-tale mirror made her sigh despairingly again. She was not built on majestic lines herself. No matter how queenly and imposing she might feel in that attitude, she only looked ridiculously stiff.

Once more she changed her seat, flouncing down

on a low sofa, and struggling for a graceful position with one elbow leaning on a huge silk cushion. It was in all seriousness that she made these changes, realizing that she could not appear at her best unless she felt at ease. But the humour of the situation was not lost on her. An amused smile dimpled her face as she gave the sofa cushion a thump and once more changed her seat. "I'm worse than Goldilocks trying all the chairs of the three bears, but that's too loppy!"

She whisked into a fourth seat, this time opposite the portières. To her consternation the parted curtains revealed an appalling fact. Not only could the winding stairway be seen from where she sat, but the entire interior of the reception room must be equally visible to any one coming down the steps. The dignified white-haired Personage now on the bottom step must have seen every move she made as she darted around the room trying the chairs in turn.

The faint gleam of suppressed amusement on Madam Chartley's face as she entered, confirmed the girl's fears. It was unthinkable that such a mortifying situation should go unexplained, yet for a moment after Madam's courteous greeting Mary stood tongue-tied. Then she burst out, her face fairly purple:

"Oh, I *wish* you could change places with me for just five minutes! Then you'd know how it feels to always put your worst foot first and make a mess of everything!"

Madam Chartley had welcomed many types of girls to her school and was familiar with every shade of embarrassment, but she had never been greeted with quite such an outburst as this. Desperate to make herself understood, Mary began in the middle of her carefully planned speech and breathlessly explained backward, as to why she had arrived at this inopportune time. The explanation was so characteristic of her, so heart-felt and utterly honest, that it revealed far more than she intended and opened a wide door into Madam's sympathies. As she stood looking down at the girl with grave kind eyes, Mary suddenly became aware of a strangely comforting thing. This was not an awesome personage, but a dear adorable being who could *understand*. The discovery made the second part of her explanation easier. She plunged into it headlong as soon as they were seated.

"You see, I've heard so much about Hawkins and the way he sometimes confuses the new girls with his grand London airs till they're too rattled to eat, that I made up my mind that even if I am

from Arizona, I'd made him think that I've always 'dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs at my side.' I thought I was making a perfectly regal entrance, till I looked into the mirror and saw how dilapidated I was after my long journey. It took all the heart out of me and made me dreadfully nervous about meeting you. I was trying to get into an easy attitude that would make me feel more self-possessed when you came down. That is why I was experimenting with all the sofas and chairs. Oh, you've no idea how the Walton girls and Lloyd Sherman and Betty Lewis have talked about you," she went on hurriedly, eager to justify herself. "They made me feel that you were — well — er — sort of like *royalty* you know. That one ought to courtesy and back out from your presence as they do at court."

Madam laughed an appreciative little laugh that showed a thorough enjoyment of the situation. "But when you saw that the girls were mistaken — "

Mary interrupted hurriedly, blushing again in her confusion. "No, no! they were not mistaken! You're exactly as they described you, only they didn't tell me how — how — er," she groped frantically for the word and finished lamely, "how *human* you are."

She had started to say "how *adorable* you are," but checked herself, afraid it would sound too gushing on first acquaintance, although that was exactly what she felt.

"I mean," she continued, in her effort to be understood, "it seems from the way you put yourself in my place so quickly, that once upon a time you must have been the same kind of girl that I am. But of course I know you were not. You were Lloyd Sherman's kind. She just naturally does the right thing in the right place, and there's no occasion for her being a copy-cat. That's what Jack calls me. Jack is my brother."

Madam laughed again, such an appreciative, friendly laugh, that Mary joined in, wondering how the other girls could think her cold and unapproachable. It seemed to her that Madam was one of the most responsive and sympathetic listeners she had ever had, and it moved her to go on with her confidences.

"Jack says I am not built on the same lines as the Princess. Princess Winsome is one of our names for Lloyd. And he says it is ridiculous for me to try to do things the way she does. He is always quoting Epictetus to me: 'Were I a nightingale I would act the part of a nightingale; were I

a swan, the part of a swan.' He says that trying to copy her is what makes me just plain goose so much of the time."

Madam Chartley, long accustomed to reading girls, knew that it was not vanity or egotism which prompted these confessions, only a girlish eagerness to be measured by her highest ideals and not by appearances. She saw at a glance the possibilities of the material that lay here at her hand. Out of it might be wrought a strong, helpful character such as the world always needs, and such as she longed to send out with every graduate who passed through her doors. Many things were awaiting her attention elsewhere, but she lingered to extend their acquaintance a trifle further.

"You know Lloyd Sherman well, I believe," she said. "I remember that you gave Mrs. Sherman as one of your references when you applied for admission to the school, and I had a highly satisfactory letter from her about you in reply to my inquiry. Now that we speak of it I am reminded that Lloyd added a most enthusiastic post-script concerning you."

Mary's face flushed with a pleasure so intense it was almost painful. "Oh, did she?" she cried eagerly. "We've been friends always, even with

half a continent between us. Our mothers were school-mates. Lloyd was more Joyce's friend than mine at first, because they are nearer of an age. (Joyce is my sister. She's an artist now in New York City, and we think she's going to be famous some day. She does such beautiful designing.) Lloyd has been my model ever since I was eleven years old. I'd rather be like her than anybody I ever knew or read of, so I don't mind Jack calling me a copy-cat for trying. One of the reasons I wanted to come to Warwick Hall was that she had been here. Would you believe it?" she rattled on, "Last night on the sleeping-car I counted up forty-two good reasons for wanting to come here to school."

It had been many a moon since Mary's remarks had met with such flattering attention. Not realizing she was being studied she felt that Madam was genuinely interested. It encouraged her to go on.

"Jack gave me my choice of all the schools in the United States, and I chose this without hesitating an instant. Jack is paying my expenses you know. I couldn't have come a step if it hadn't been for him, and there wouldn't have been the faintest shadow of a hope of coming if he hadn't been promoted to the position of assistant manager

at the mines. Oh, Madam Chartley, I *wish* you knew Jack! He's just the dearest brother that ever lived! So unselfish and so ambitious for us all" —

She stopped abruptly, feeling that she was letting her enthusiasm run away with her tongue. But Madam, noting the quick leap of light to her eyes and the eager clasping of her hands as she spoke of him wanted to hear more. She was sure that in these naïve confessions she would find the keynote to Mary's character. So with a few well chosen questions she encouraged her to go on, till she had gathered a very accurate idea of the conditions which had produced this wholesome enthusiastic little creature, almost a woman in some respects, the veriest child in others.

Mary had had an uneventful life, she judged, limited to the narrow bounds of a Kansas village, and later to the still narrower circle of experiences in the lonely little home they had made on the edge of the desert, when Mrs. Ware's quest of health led them to Arizona. But it was a life that had been lifted out of the ordinary by the brave spirit which made a jest of poverty, and held on to the refining influences even while battling back the wolf from the door. It had made a family of phi-

losophers of them, able to extract pleasure from trifles, and to find it where most people would never dream of looking.

As she listened, Madam began to feel warmly drawn to the entire family who had taken the good old Vicar of Wakefield for an example, and adopted one of his sayings as a rule of life: "Let us be inflexible and fortune will at last turn in our favour."

Mary had no intention of revealing so much personal history, but she had to quote the motto to show how triumphantly it had worked out in their case and what a grand turn fortune had taken in their favour after so many years of struggle to keep inflexible in the face of repeated disappointments and troubles. It had turned for all of them. Joyce, after several years of work and worry with her bees, had realized enough from them to start on her career as an artist. Holland was at Annapolis in training for the navy. Within the last six weeks Jack's promotion had made possible his heart's desire, to send Mary to school and to bring his mother and thirteen year old brother to Lone-Rock, the little mining town where he had been boarding, ever since Mr. Sherman gave him his first position there, several years before.

Mary was so bubbling over with the pleasure these things gave her that it was impossible not to feel some share of it when one looked at her. As Madam Chartley led the way to the office she felt a desire to add still more to her pleasure. It was refreshing to see some one who could enjoy even little things so thoroughly. She bent over the ledger a moment, scanning the page containing the list of Freshmen who had passed the strict entrance requirements.

"I had already assigned you to a room," she said, "but from what you tell me I fancy you would count it a privilege to be given Lloyd's old room. If that is so I'll gladly make the change, although I do not know whether the other girl assigned to that room will prove as congenial a companion to you as the first selection. Her mother asked for that particular room, so I cannot well change."

Mary's face grew radiant. "Oh, Madam Chartley!" she cried. "I'd room with a Hottentot for a chance to stay inside the four walls that held the Princess all her school-days. You don't know how much it means to me! You've made me the happiest girl on the face of the globe."

"It's a far cry from Ethelinda Hurst to a Hot-

tentot," laughed Madam Chartley. "She comes from one of the wealthiest homes in the suburbs of Chicago, and has had every advantage that civilization can offer. She's been abroad eight times, I believe, and has always studied at home under private tutors. She's an only daughter."

"How interesting! That will be lots more diverting than a room-mate who has always done the same common-place things that I have. Oh, you've no idea how hard I'm going to work to deserve all this! I wrote to Jack last night that I intend to tackle school this year just the way I used to kill snakes — with all my might and main!"

An amused expression crossed Madam Chartley's face again. She was thinking of Ethelinda and the possible effect the two girls might have on each other. At any rate it was an experiment worth trying. It might prove beneficial to them both. She turned to Mary with a smile, and pressed a button beside her desk.

"Your trunk shall be sent up as soon as the men find time to attend to it. In the meantime you may take possession of your room as soon as you please."

CHAPTER II

"THE KING'S CALL"

LEFT to herself in the room which she was to occupy for the year, Mary stood looking around with the keen interest of an explorer. It was a pleasant room, with two windows looking out over the river and two over the garden. To an ordinary observer it had no claim to superiority over the other apartments, but to Mary it was a sort of shrine. Here in the low chair by the window her Princess Winsome had sat to read and study and dream all through her school days.

Here was the mirror that had caught her passing reflection so often, that it still seemed to hold a thousand shadowy semblances of her in its shining depths. Only the June before (three short months ago) she had stood in front of it in all the glory of her Commencement gown.

Mary crossed the room on tiptoe, smiling at the recollection of one of her early make-believes. Oh, if it were only true that one could pass through the

looking-glass into the wonderland behind it, what a charming picture gallery she would find! All the girls who had occupied the room since Warwick Hall had been a school! Blue eyes and brown, laughing faces and wistful ones, girls in gorgeous full dress, pluming themselves for some evening entertainment, girls in dainty undress and unbound hair, exchanging bed-time confidences as they prepared for the night, ambitious little saints and frivolous little sinners — they were all there, somewhere in the dim background of the mirror, and because of them there was a subtle charm about the room to Mary, which she would not have felt if she had been its first occupant.

"It's like opening an old drawer to drop in a handful of fresh rose-leaves, and finding it sweet with the roses of a dozen Junes gone by," she said to herself, so pleased with the fancy that she went on elaborating it.

"And Lloyd has been here so lately that *her* rose-leaves haven't even begun to wither."

There is no loyalty like the loyalty of a little school-girl for the older girl whom she has enshrined in her heart as her ideal; no sentiment like the intense admiration which puts a halo around everything the beloved voice ever praised, or makes

sacred everything the beloved fingers have touched. Mary Ware at sixteen had not outgrown any of the ardent admiration for Lloyd Sherman which had seized her when she was only eleven, and now the desire to be like her flared up stronger than ever.

She peered wistfully into the mirror, thinking, "Maybe just being in her old room will help, because I shall be reminded of her at every turn."

For a moment the selfish wish was uppermost that she need not share the room with any one. It seems almost desecration for a person who did not know and love Lloyd to be so intimately associated with her. But Mary's love of companionship was strong. Half the fun of boarding school in her opinion was in having a room-mate, and she could not forego that pleasure even for the sake of a very deep and tender sentiment. But she made the most of her solitude while she had it. From kodak pictures she had seen of the room, she knew at a glance which of the narrow white beds had been Lloyd's, and immediately pre-empted it for herself, staking out her claim by depositing her hat and gloves upon it.

As soon as her trunk was brought up stairs she fell to work unpacking, with an energy in no wise

diminished by the fatigue of the tiresome journey. She had been cooped up on the cars so long that she was fairly aching for something to do. In an hour's time all her clothes were neatly folded or hung away, her shoe-pocket tacked inside the closet door, her laundry-bag hung on a convenient nail, her few pictures arranged in a group over her bed, and exactly half of the table laid out with her portfolio, books and work-basket. She had been not only just but generous in the division of property. She had left more than half the drawer space and closet hooks for the use of the unknown Ethelinda; the most comfortable chair, and the best lighted end of the table. That was because she herself had had first choice in the matter of bed and dressing table, and having seized upon the most desirable from her point of view, felt that she owed the other girl some reparation. Because they had been Lloyd's she wanted them so strongly that she was ready to sacrifice everything else in the room for them, or even fight for their possession if necessary.

By the time all was in order, the tall Lombardy poplars were throwing long shadows on the green sward of the terraces, and from the window she could see the garden, lying so sweet and still in the drowse of the late afternoon that she longed to be

down in it. She hurried to change the rumpled shirt-waist in which she had finished her journey and done her unpacking, for a fresh white dress. It was proof that the room was exerting some influence to make her like her model, that even in her haste she made a careful toilet. Remembering how dainty and thorough-going Lloyd always was in her dressing, she scrubbed away until every vestige of travel-stain was gone. All fresh and rosy, down to her immaculate finger-tips, she scanned herself in the mirror, from the carefully tied bow in her hair to the carefully tied bows on her slippers, and nodded approvingly. She could stand inspection now from the whole row of them — all those girls on the other side of the looking-glass, who somehow seemed so near and real to her.

As she turned away from the mirror, her glance rested on the little group of home pictures she had put up over her bed. The tents and tiny two-roomed cottage that they called Ware's Wigwam looked small and cramped compared to this great Hall with its wide corridors and spacious rooms. It had always seemed to Mary that she was born to live in kings' houses, she so enjoyed luxurious surroundings, but a homesick pang seized her now, as she looked down on the picture and remembered that she could never go back to it.

" It doesn't seem as if I have any home now," she sighed, " for I didn't stay long enough in the new place at Lone-Rock to get used to it. I know I shall always love the Wigwam best, and when I think of it standing empty or maybe turned over to strangers, it makes me feel as if one of my best friends had died. I'm glad we took so many pictures of it, and that I kept a record of all the good times we had there. Oh, that reminds me! There's one more thing I must do before sundown — bring my diary up to date. I haven't written a line in it for six weeks."

The out-doors was too alluring to waste another moment in the house, however, so gathering up her diary and fountain-pen, she went down stairs and out into the garden, feeling as the gate swung to behind her that she was stepping into an old, old English garden belonging to some ducal estate. Coming as she did straight from the edge of the desert, with its burning stretches of sand, its cactus and greasewood, its bare red buttes and lank rows of cotton-wood trees, this Eden of green and bloom had a double charm for her.

For a long time she wandered up and down its winding paths, finding many a shady pleasance hidden away among its labyrinths of hedges, where one

might be tempted to stop and dream away a whole long summer afternoon. But she did not pause until she came to a sort of court surrounded by rustic arbours, where a fountain splashed in the centre, and an ancient sun-dial marked the hours. With a pleased cry of recognition she ran across the closely clipped turf, to read the motto carved on the dial's face: "I only mark the hours that shine."

"The very words that Betty wrote in my Good Times Book the day she gave it to me," she said, opening her diary to verify the motto on the fly-leaf.

"It was beyond my wildest dreams then that I'd ever be standing here in Warwick Hall garden, reading them for myself! I mustn't wait another minute to make a record of this good time."

Choosing a seat in one of the arbours where a humming bird was darting in and out through a tangle of vines, she opened the thick red book in which she had kept a faithful record of her doings and goings for the last two years, and glanced at the last entry. The date was such an old one that she read the last few pages to refresh her memory.

"The Wigwam, Thursday, August 4th.

"Jack came home yesterday to our joyful surprise. Mr. Sherman had telegraphed him to come

at once to Kentucky, on a flying trip to consult with the directors of the mine. As he had to pass through Phœnix anyhow, he managed it so that he could stay over night with us. I am so happy over the prospect of his having a chance at last to see our 'Promised Land' that I am fairly beside myself. I sat up half the night making cookies and gingerbread and rolls, and broiling chickens for his lunch. He says he's been hungry for home-cooking so long that it will go away ahead of dining-car fare.

"Everything turned out beautifully, and while I waited for them to bake I wrote a list of the things he must see and questions he must ask at The Locusts; things I've wanted to know ever since I came back from Lloydsboro Valley, and yet you can't very well find out just in letters. He left on this morning's early train. If he finds he can take the time, he's going on to Annapolis for a day, just to get a glimpse of Holland, and then to New York for a day and a half with Joyce. Good old Jack! He's certainly earned his holiday. I can hardly wait for him to come home and tell all about it."

Spreading the book out on her knees, Mary adjusted her pen and began to write rapidly, for words

always crowded to her pen-point as they did to her tongue, with a rush.

"Warwick Hall, September 12.

"Little did I think when I wrote that last line, that six whole weeks would pass before I added another, or that my next entry would be made in this beautiful old garden that I have dreamed of so long. Little did I think I would be sitting here beside the old sun-dial, or that such an hour could shine for me as the happy hour when Jack came back.

"I drove into Phœnix to meet him, and I knew from the way he waved his hat and swung off the steps before the train stopped that he had good news, and it was! Perfectly splendid! They had made him assistant manager of the mines, with a great big salary that would make a change in all our fortunes. I thought it was queer that he should bring a trunk back with him, for he went away with only a suit-case, but I was so busy asking questions about Joyce and Holland and everybody at The Locusts, that there wasn't time or breath to ask about the trunk. We were half way home before he got around to that.

"He said his first thought when they told him

of his promotion was, 'Now Mary can have her heart's desire and go away to school.' And on the way to New York he planned it all out, how we'd give up the Wigwam, and take a house in Lone-Rock, and he'd get some one to help Mamma with the work, and he'd have Norman under his eye all the time when he was out of school, and keep him out of mischief. He's been wanting to do that ever since he went to the mines, for there never was such a home-body. He can't bear to board.

"Nearly all of that little scrap of a visit he and Joyce had together, those blessed children spent in getting my clothes. Joyce has all my measurements, and they got me three dresses and a hat and a lot of shirt-waists and gloves and fixings, all so beautiful and stylish and New Yorkey, *and* the fine big trunk to put them in. There was even a new brush and comb and mirror, for she remembered how ratty looking my old things were. And there was a letter portfolio and a silk umbrella and a lot of odds and ends that all school-girls need. I don't believe they overlooked a thing to make my outfit complete, and I know they're as nice as any the others will have, for Joyce has such good taste and always knows just what is fit and proper. I feel so elegant in my pretty blue travelling suit, and I'm

just aching for a chance to wear the beautiful little evening dresses they chose, one white pongee, and the other some new sort of goods that looks just like a soft shimmery cloud, a regular picture dress.

" Jack went on to the mines next day, and after that everything was in a whirl till we were moved and settled, for there was so much to do, packing the furniture to be shipped, and after we got to the new house unpacking again and shifting things around till it got all liveable and homelike. By that time it was time for me to get my things together and go down to Phœnix to meet the people who had offered to take me under their wing on their way back East. Judge and Mrs. Stockton brought me. I must remember the date of Mrs. Stockton's birthday, November the fourth, and send her one of those bead purses. She admired the one she saw me making so much that I know she would like it, and she certainly was an angel to me on the trip. It seems to me it's my luck to meet nice people everywhere I go.

" I'm not going to wait till the last Thursday in November for my Thanksgiving Day. I've got seven good reasons for thanksgiving this very minute. First, we got here without a wreck. Second, the ribbon on my hat doesn't show a single spot,

after all the hard shower that we got caught in, that I thought had ruined it. Third, I *think* I impressed Hawkins as I hoped to, even if I was a bit nervous. Fourth, while my introduction to Madam Chartley was horribly mortifying, all's well that ends well, and she didn't lay it up against me. I think she must have taken quite a fancy to me instead or she wouldn't have given me my fifth and greatest reason for thankfulness, the privilege of occupying Lloyd's old room. Maybe I oughtn't to put that as the greatest reason, for of course it's greater just to be here at all, and seventh, I'll never get done being thankful that I've got Jack for a brother. That really is the best of all, and I'm going to make so much out of my opportunities this year, that he'll feel repaid for all he's done for me, and be glad and proud that he could do it."

Filling another page with an account of her journey and her impressions of the place, Mary closed her journal with a sigh of relief that the long-neglected entry had been made. Then she leaned back on the rustic bench and gave herself up to the enjoyment of her surroundings. The fountain splashed softly. A lazy breeze stirred the vines, and fanned her face. Far below, the shining Potomac took its

slow way to the sea between its lines of drooping willows. The calm and repose of the stately old place seemed to steal in on her soul not only through eye and ear and sense of touch, but at every pore.

"It's the strangest thing," she mused. "I must be a sort of chameleon, the way I change with my surroundings. It doesn't seem possible that only last week I was scrambling around with my head tied up in a towel, scrubbing and cleaning and dragging furniture around at a break-neck speed. I could almost believe I've never done anything all my life but trail around this garden at my elegant leisure like some fine lady-in-waiting."

There was time for a stroll down to the river before the falling twilight recalled her to the house. As she went down the flight of marble steps it was with the self-conscious feeling that she was a girl in a play, and this was one of the scenes in Act I. She had seen a setting like this on a stage one time, when a beautiful lady trailed down the steps of a Venetian palace to the gondola waiting in the lagoon below. To be sure Mary's dress did not trail, and she was not tall and willowy outwardly, but it made no difference as long as she could *feel* that she was. For a long time she walked slowly back and forth along the river path, pausing now and then to look

up at the great castle-like building above her. She had never seen one before so suggestive of old-world grandeur. Already it was giving her more than she would find inside in its text-books. Peculiarly susceptible to surroundings, she unconsciously held herself more erect, as if such a stately habitation demanded it of her. And when she climbed the steps again, with it looming up before her in the red afterglow, the dignity and repose of its lines, from its massive portal to its highest turret, awakened a response in her beauty-loving little soul that thrilled her like music.

She went softly through the great door and up the stair-case, pausing for a moment on the landing to look at the coat-of-arms in the stained glass window. It was a copy of the window in the old ancestral castle in England, that belonged to Madam Chartley's family. Mary already knew the story of its traditional founder, the first Edryn who had won his knighthood in valiant deeds for King Arthur. In the dim light the coat-of-arms gleamed like jewels in an amber setting, and the heart in the crest, the heart out of which rose a mailed hand grasping a spear, was like a great ruby.

"I keep the tryste," whispered Mary, reading the motto of the scroll underneath. "No wonder

Madam Chartley grew up to be so patrician. Anybody might with a window like that in the house."

Some one began striking loud full chords on a piano in one of the rooms below; some one with a strong masterful touch. Mary was sure it was a man. By leaning over the banister until she almost lost her balance, she caught a glimpse of a pair of black coat-tails swinging awkwardly over a piano bench. Herr Vogelbaum, the musical director, must have arrived. Probably she would meet him at dinner. That was something to look forward to — an artist who had played before crowned heads and had been lionized all over Germany. And then the chords rolled into something so beautiful and inspiring that Mary knew that for the first time in her life she was hearing really great music, played by a master. She sat down on the steps to listen.

The self-conscious feeling that she was acting a part in a play came back afresh, and made her hastily pull down her skirts and assume a listening attitude. Thinking how effective she would look on a stage she leaned back against the carved banister, clasping her hands around her knees, and gazing up at the ruby heart in the stained glass window above her. But in a moment both self and pose were forgotten. She had never dreamed that the world held

such music as the flood of melody which came rolling up from below. It seemed to lift her out of herself and into another world; a world of nameless longings and exalted ambitions, of burning desire to do great deeds. Something was calling her — calling and calling with the compelling note of a far-off yet insistent trumpet, and as she gazed at the mailed hand with the spear rising triumphantly out of the ruby heart, she began to understand. A feeling of awe crept over her, that she, little Mary Ware, should be hearing the same call that Edryn heard. Somewhere, some day, some great achievement awaited her. Now she knew that that was why she had been born into the world. That was why, too, that Providence had opened a way for her to come to Warwick Hall, that she might learn what was to be "the North-star of her great ambition," and how "to keep the compass needle of her soul" ever true to it.

Clasping her hands together as reverently and humbly as if she were before an altar, she looked up at the ruby heart, her face all alight, whispering Edryn's answer:

> "'Tis the King's call! O list!
> O heart and hand of mine keep tryst —
> Keep tryst or die!"

The music stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and all atingle with the exalted mood in which it left her, she ran up to her room and knelt by the window, looking out into the dusk with eager shining eyes. As yet it was all vague and shadowy, that mysterious future which awaited her. With what great duty to the universe she was to keep tryst she did not know; but whatever it was she would do it at any cost. To callow wings no flight is too high to attempt. At sixteen all things are possible.

All girls of Mary's imaginative impulsive temperament have had such moments, under the spell of some unusual inspiration, but their dreams are apt to vanish at contact with the earth again, as suddenly as a bubble breaks when some material object touches it. But with Mary the vision stayed. True, it had to retire into the background when dinner was announced, and her over-weening curiosity brought her down to the consideration of common everyday affairs, but she did not lose the sense of having been set apart in some way by that supreme moment on the stair. To the world she might be only an ordinary little Freshman, but inwardly she knew she was a sort of Joan of Arc, called and consecrated to some high destiny.

She went down to dinner in an uplifted frame of

mind that made her passage down the long dining room in the wake of Madam and the few returned teachers a veritable march of triumph. The feeling that the curtain had gone up on an interesting play in which she was chief actor came back stronger than ever when she took her seat in one of the high-backed ebony chairs, with the carved griffins atop, and unfolded her napkin in the gaze of a long line of ancestral portraits.

Madam Chartley, who had been looking forward to the dinner hour with some apprehension on the new pupil's account, knowing she would be obliged to curb the lively little tongue if she talked at the table as she had done in the reception room, was amazed at the change in her. Warwick Hall had done its work. Already the little chameleon had taken on the colour of her surroundings. Hawkins, in all his years of London service, had never served a more demure, self-possessed little English maiden, or one who listened with greater deference to the conversation of her elders.

She spoke only when she was spoken to, but some of her odd, unexpected replies made Herr Vogelbaum look up with an interest he rarely took in anything outside of his music and his dinner. Miss Chilton was so amused at her accounts of Arizona

life, that she invited her up to her room, and led her into a conversation that revealed her most original traits.

"She's a bright little thing," Miss Chilton reported to Madam afterward. "The kind of a girl who is bound to be popular in a school, just because she's so different and interesting."

"She is more than that," answered Madam, smiling over the recollection of some of her quaint speeches. "She is lovable. She has 'the divine gift of making friends.'"

CHAPTER III

ROOM - MATES

Up in her orderly room, on opening day, Mary listened to the bustle of arrivals, and the stir of unpacking going on all over the house. The cordial greetings called back and forth from the various rooms and the laughter in the halls made her long to have a part in the general sociability. She wished that it were necessary for her to borrow a hammer or to ask information about the trunk-room and the porter, as the other new girls were doing. That would give her an excuse for going into some of the rooms and making acquaintance with their occupants. But everything was in absolute order, and she was already familiar with the place and its rules. There was nothing for her to do but take out her bead-work and occupy herself with that as best she could until the arrival of her room-mate.

She set her door invitingly open, ready to meet more than half way any advances her neighbours might choose to make. While she sorted her beads

she amused herself by fitting together the scraps of conversation which floated her way, and making guesses as to the personality of the speakers. Twice her open door brought the reward of a transient visitor. Once a jolly Sophomore glanced in to say "I just wanted to see who has the American Beauty room. That's what we called it last term when Kitty Walton and Lloyd Sherman had it."

Soon after, a girl across the hall whom Mary had already identified as one Dora Irene Derwent, called Dorene for short, darted in unceremoniously with an agonized plea for a bit of court-plaster.

"I cut my finger on a piece of glass in a picture frame that got broken in my trunk," she explained, unwinding her handkerchief to see if the bleeding had stopped. "I can't find my emergency case, and Cornie Dean never was known to keep anything of the sort. All the other rooms are so upset I knew it was of no use to apply to them."

Happy that such an opportunity had come at last and that she could supply the demand, Mary examined the injured finger and began to trim a strip of plaster the required size. At the moment of cutting herself Dorene had dropped the broken glass, but for some unaccountable reason had thrust the frame under her arm, and was holding it hugged tight to

her side by her elbow. Now as she put out her hand for Mary's inspection, she sat down on the edge of the bed, and let the frame slip from her grasp to the counterpane. The photograph side lay uppermost, and Mary, glancing at it casually, gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, it's *Betty!* Betty Lewis! Do *you* know her?"

"Well, rather!" was the emphatic answer. "She was my crush all my Freshman year. I suppose you know what that means if you've ever had a case yourself. I simply adored her, and could hardly bear to come back the next year because she was graduated and gone. I haven't seen her since, but you can imagine my delight when I found her name in this year's catalogue, as one of the teachers. We never imagined she'd teach, for she has such a wonderful gift for writing; but it will be simply delightful to have her back again. She's such a dear. But where did *you* happen to know her?" she added as an afterthought. "Are you from Lloydsboro Valley, too?"

"No, but I visited there once at Lloyd Sherman's home where Betty lives. Lloyd's mother is Betty's god-mother, you know, and Betty's mother was my sister Joyce's god-mother. We're all mixed up that

way on account of our mothers being old school friends, as if we were related. Of course, I shall call her Miss Lewis before the other girls. Mamma says it wouldn't be showing proper respect not to. But it's such a comfort to be able to call her Betty behind the scenes. She came yesterday. Last night she was up in my room for more than an hour with me, talking about the places and people we both know in the valley. It made me so happy I could hardly go to sleep. Elise Walton came with her, Kitty's sister, you know."

"Oh, is she as bright and funny as Kitty?" demanded Dorene. "If she is we certainly shall lay siege to you two for our sorority. We ought to have first claim, for all the other Lloydsboro Valley girls belong to us. Come over and see Cornie."

Conscious that as a friend of the Valley girls she had gone up many degrees in Dorene's estimation, Mary put away her scissors and plaster-case, and followed her newfound acquaintance across the hall. Her cordial reception gave her what she had been longing for all morning, the sense of being in intimate touch with things in the inner circle of school life. Because she knew Lloyd and Betty so well, they took her in as one of themselves, gave

her a seat on a suit-case, the chairs all being full, and climbed over her and around her as they went on with their unpacking. Mary was in her element, and blossomed out into such an interesting visitor, that Dorene was glad that she had discovered her. This was the beginning of the fourth year that she and Cornie had roomed together, and to Mary their companionship seemed ideal.

"I hope my room-mate will prove as congenial as you two," she said, after listening half an hour to their laughing repartee and their ridiculous discussions as to the arrangement of their pictures and bric-à-brac. "I've been looking forward all morning to her coming. Every time I think of her I have the same excited, creepy feeling that I used to have when I opened a prize pop-corn box. My little brother and I used to save all our pennies for them when we were little tots back in Kansas. We didn't eat the pop-corn, that is *I* didn't. It was the flutter and thrill I wanted, that comes when you've almost reached the bottom of the box, and know the next grab will bring the prize into your fingers. I was always hoping I might find one of those little rings with a red setting that I could pretend was a real garnet. No matter if it did always turn out to be nothing but a toy soldier or a tin whistle, there was

always some kind of a surprise, and that delicious uncertain creepy feeling first."

"Well, you don't always draw a prize in your pop-corn when you're drawing room-mates, I can tell you *that!*" announced Cornie emphatically.

"I was at a school the year before I came here, where I had to room with a girl who almost drove me to distraction. She was a mild, modest little thing, who, as Cowper says:

> "'Would not with a peremptory tone
> Assert the nose upon her face her own.'

Yet she'd do things that would provoke me beyond endurance. Sometimes I could hardly keep from choking her."

"What kind of things for instance?" asked Mary.

"Well, for one thing, and it does seem a little one when you tell it, we had about a thousand photographs, more or less, perched around on the mantel and walls. Essie was so painfully modest that she couldn't bear to undress with them looking at her, so she'd turn their faces to the wall, and then next morning she'd be so slow about getting down to breakfast that there wouldn't be time to turn them back. There my poor family and friends

would have to stay with their faces to the wall all day as if they were in disgrace, unless I went around and turned them all back myself.

"Then she was such a queer little mouse; didn't really come out of her hole and get sociable until after dark. As soon as the lights were out and we were in bed, she'd want to talk. No matter how sleepy I was, that was the time to tell all her troubles. She was so humble and respectful in asking my advice that I couldn't throw a pillow at her and shut her up, so there she'd lie and talk in a stage whisper till after midnight. Then it was like pulling teeth to get her up in the morning. She took to setting an alarm clock for awhile, to rouse her early and give her half an hour to wake up in. It never made the slightest difference to her, but always wakened me. Finally I unscrewed the alarm key and hid it. She was so sensitive that I couldn't scold and fuss about things. Now with Dorene here, I simply gag her when she talks too much, shut her in the closet when she gets in my way, and scalp her when she doesn't do as she is bid."

Without any reason for forming such a mental picture of her prospective room-mate, Mary had imagined her to be a blue-eyed, golden-haired little creature, with a sort of wax-doll prettiness: a girl

made to be petted and considered and shielded like a delicate flower. The type appealed to her. Independent and capable herself, she was prepared to be almost motherly in her care for Ethelinda's comfort. With this preconceived notion it was somewhat of a shock when she went back to her room and found the real Ethelinda being ushered into it.

She was not blue-eyed and appealing. She was large, she was self-assured, and she took possession of the room in an expansive all-pervading sort of way that made Mary feel very small and insignificant. The room itself that heretofore had been so spacious suddenly seemed to shrink, and when a huge trunk was brought in, it was fairly crowded.

Mary drew her chair into the narrow space between the bed and the window, but even there she felt in the way. "I don't see why I should," she thought with vague resentment. "It's as much my room as hers."

It was one of the requirements of the school that all trunks must be emptied and sent to the storeroom on arrival, and presently, as Ethelinda seemed ignorant of the rule, Mary told her and offered to help her unpack. The answer was excessively polite, so polite that it left Mary at greater arm's length than before.

Fanchon was to do the unpacking. She had come on purpose for that. In a few moments Fanchon came in, a middle-aged woman who had accompanied her from home, and who was to return as soon as her charge was properly settled. The two conversed in French, as Ethelinda, with her hands clasped behind her head, tipped back in a rocking chair and lazily watched proceedings. She was utterly regardless of Mary's presence.

"I might as well be the door-knob for all the notice she takes of me," thought Mary resentfully. "Well, she may prove to be as much as a tin whistle, but she certainly isn't the prize I had hoped to find."

She cast another furtive glance at her over her bead-stringing, slowly making up her estimate of her.

"She's what Joyce would call a drab blonde — washed out complexion and sallow hair. She looks drab all the way through to me, but she may be the kind that improves on acquaintance. She certainly has a good figure, and looks as stylish as one of those fashion ladies in *Vogue*."

From time to time Mary proffered bits of information as occasion offered, as to which of the drawers were empty and how to pull the wardrobe door a certain way when it stuck, but her friendly

advances were so coldly received, that presently she slipped out of the room and went over to the East wing to see what Elise Walton was doing.

Elise had already made friends with her roommate, a little dumpling of a girl by the name of Agnes Olive Miggs, and was calling her A.O. as every one else did. In five minutes Mary was calling her A.O. too, and wishing a little enviously that either one of these bright friendly girls could have fallen to her lot instead of the polite iceberg she had run away from.

"But I won't complain of her to them," she thought loyally. "Maybe she'll improve on acquaintance and be so nice that I'd be sorry some day that I said anything against her."

Several other girls came in while she sat there, and a box of candy was passed around. Finding herself in the company of congenial young spirits was a new experience for Mary.

"Now I know what it means to be 'in the swim,'" she thought exultantly. "I feel like a duck who has found a whole lake to swim in, when it has never had anything bigger than a puddle before."

The sensation was so exhilarating that it prompted her to exert herself to keep on saying funny things

and send her audience off into gales of laughter. And all the time the consciousness deepened that they really liked her, that she was really entertaining them.

After lunch the day went by in a rush. Each teacher met her classes, programmes were arranged and lessons assigned. By night Mary had made the acquaintance of every girl in the Freshman class and many of the others. She started to her room all aglow with the new experiences, thinking that if she could only find Ethelinda responsive it would put the finishing touch to a perfect day. Betty was in the upper hall surrounded by an admiring circle, for all the old girls who remembered her as the star of her class, and all the new ones who had been attracted to her from the moment they saw her were crowding around her as if she were holding some kind of court. It was a moment of triumph for Mary when Betty laughingly excused herself from them all and drew her aside.

"Come into my room a few minutes," she said. "I've something to show you." While she was looking through her desk to find it she asked, "Well, how goes it, little girl? Is school all you dreamed it would be?"

"Betty, she won't thaw out a bit."

"Who, dear?"

"That Miss Ethelinda Hurst. When I went up stairs to dress for dinner I tried my best to be sociable, and brought up every subject that I thought would interest her. She barely answered till she found that I had come out to Warwick Hall from the city alone. That horrified her, to think I'd taken a step without a chaperon, and she said it in such a way that I couldn't help saying that I thought one must feel like a poodle tied to a string — always fastened to a chaperon. As for me give me liberty or give me death. And she answered, 'Oh, aren't you *queer!*' Then after awhile I tried again, but she wouldn't draw out worth a cent. Said she had never roomed with any one before, but supposed it was one of the disagreeable things one had to put up with when one went away to school. Imagine! Pleasant for me, wasn't it!"

"Try letting her alone for awhile," advised Betty. "Beat her at her own game. Play dumb for — say a week."

"But that is so much good time wasted, when we might be chums from the start. When you're going to bed is the cream of the day. You see you always had Lloyd, so you don't know what it is like to room with an oyster."

"Here it is," announced Betty, unwrapping the package she had just found, and passing it to Mary. "Lloyd's latest photograph, the best she has ever had taken, in my opinion. It's so lifelike you almost wait to hear her speak. And I like it because it's so simple and girlish. I suppose the next one will be taken in evening gown after she makes her début."

"Oh, is it for me?" was the happy cry.

"Yes, frame, picture, nail to hang it on and all. Lloyd sent it with her love. The day the photographs came home, she found that funny slip of paper with all the questions on it Jack was to ask. And you wanted so especially to know just how the Princess looked and how she was wearing her hair and all that, that she said, 'I believe I'll send one of these to Mary. She'll admire it whether any one else does or not.'"

"Tell me about her," begged Mary, propping the frame up in front of her that she might watch the beloved face while she listened.

Nothing loath, Betty sat down and began to talk of the gay summer just gone, of the picnics and the barn parties, the moonlight drives, the rainy days at the Log Cabin, the many knights who came a-riding by to pay court to the fair daughter of the house.

Then she told of her own good times and the disappointment when her manuscript had been returned, and the reason for her coming to Warwick Hall to teach.

"I have come to serve my apprenticeship," she explained. "The old Colonel advised me to. He said I must live awhile — have some experiences that go deeper than the carefree existence I have been living, before I can write anything worth while. I am sure he is right."

When Mary had heard all that Betty could remember to tell, she took her departure, carrying the picture and the nail on which to hang it. She wanted to show it to Ethelinda, she was so proud of it, but heroically refrained. Early as it was Ethelinda was undressing.

Mary had intended to do many things before bedtime, write in her journal, mend the rip in her skirt, start a letter to Jack, and maybe make some break in the wall of reserve which Ethelinda still kept persistently between them. But when she saw the preparations for retiring she hesitated, perplexed.

"She's tired from her long journey," she thought, "so maybe I ought not to sit up and keep the light burning. Maybe she'll appreciate it if I go to bed, too. I can lie and think even if I'm not sleepy."

The rip in the skirt had to be mended, however, or she would not be presentable in the morning. It was a small one, and she did not sit down to the task, but in order that she might work faster stood up and took short hurried stitches. Next, taking off her shoe to use the heel as a hammer, she drove the nail in the wall over the side of her bed, and hung the picture where she could see it the last thing at night and the first in the morning. Then, retiring behind her screen, she made her preparations for the night. They were completed long before Ethelinda's, and climbing into bed she lay looking at the new picture, glad for this opportunity to gaze at it to her heart's content.

It made her think of so many things that she loved to recall — little incidents of her visit to The Locusts; and the smiling lips seemed to be saying, "Don't you remember" in such a friendly companionable way that she whispered to herself, "Oh, you dear! If you were only here this year, what an angel of a chum you would make!"

Then she looked across at Ethelinda, who had arranged the windows to her satisfaction and was now stretching the electric light cord from her dressing table to her bed, so that the bulb would hang directly over it. In another moment she had

propped herself comfortably against the pillows, and settled down with a book.

Mary sat up astonished. She had sacrificed her own plans and come to bed for Ethelinda's sake, and now here was the electric light blazing full in her eyes, utterly regardless of *her* comfort. She was about to sputter an indignant protest when she looked up at the picture. It seemed to smile back at her as if it were a real person with whom she might exchange amused glances. "Did you ever see such colossal unconcern?" she whispered, as if the pictured Lloyd could hear.

For a moment she thought she would get up and do the things she had intended doing when she came up stairs, but it required too much of an effort to dress again, and she was more tired than she had realized after her exciting day. So she lay still. She began to get drowsy presently, but she could not go to sleep with that irritating light in her eyes. She threw a counterpane over the footboard, but it was too low to shield her. Finally in desperation she slipped out of bed and got her umbrella. Then opening it over her she thrust its handle under the pillow to hold it in place, and lay back under its sheltering canopy with a suppressed giggle.

" LAY BACK UNDER ITS SHELTERING CANOPY WITH A SUPPRESSED GIGGLE."

Again she looked up at Lloyd's picture, thinking, "I'd have been awfully mad if you hadn't been here to smile with me over it."

The bulb began to sway, throwing shadows across the wall. Ethelinda had struck the cord in reaching up to pull her pillows higher. The flickering shadows made Mary think of something — a verse that Lloyd had written in her autograph album once, because it was the motto of the Seminary Shadow Club.

> This learned I from the shadow of a tree
> That to and fro did sway upon the wall,
> Our shadow selves — our influence, may fall
> Where we can never be."

She repeated it drowsily, peering out from under her umbrella at the swaying shadows, till something the lines suggested made her sit up, wide awake.

"Why, I can take *you* for my chum, of course," she thought. "Your *shadow*-self. Then it won't make any difference whether Miss Haughtiness Hurst talks to me or not. *You*'ll understand and sympathize with me."

All her life when Mary's world did not measure up to her expectations, she had been in the habit of making a world of her own; a beautiful make-

believe place that held all her heart's desires. It had given her gilded coaches and Cinderella ball-attire in her nursery days, and enchanted orchards whose trees bore all manner of confections. It had bestowed beauty and fortune and accomplishments on her, and sent dashing cavaliers to seek her hand when she came to the romance-reading age. Friends and social pleasures were hers at will when the lonely desert life grew irksome. Whatever was dull the Midas touch of her imagination made golden, so now it was easy to close her eyes and conjure up a make-believe chum that for the time was as good as a real one.

Absorbed in her book, Ethelinda read on until the signal sounded for lights out. Never before accustomed to such restrictions, she looked up impatiently. She had forgotten where she was for the moment in the interest of her book. When her glance fell on the umbrella, spread over Mary's bed like a tent, she raised herself on her elbow with a look of astonishment. It took her some time to understand why it had been put there.

Never having roomed with any one before, and never having had to consider any one's convenience besides her own, it had not occurred to her that she might be making Mary uncomfortable. The mute

umbrella called attention to the fact more eloquently than any protest could have done. Ethelinda had endured having a room-mate as she endured all the other disagreeable requirements of the school. Now for the first time it dawned upon her that there might be two sides to this story, also that this strange girl who seemed so eager to intrude herself on her notice might be worth knowing after all. If Mary could have seen her bewildered stare and then the amused expression which twitched her mouth for an instant, she would have had hopes that the thawing out process had begun.

CHAPTER IV

"AYE, THERE'S THE RUB!"

TRUE to the course she had laid out for herself, Mary was as dumb next morning as if she had really lost the power of speech. Judging from her manner one would have thought that she was alone in the room, and that she was having a beautiful time all by herself. She was waiting for Ethelinda to make the advances this time, and as she did not see fit even to say good-morning, the dressing proceeded in a silence so profound that it could almost be felt.

There was a broad smile on Mary's face most of the time. She was ready to laugh outright over the absurd situation, and from time to time she cast an amused glance at Lloyd's picture, as if her amusement were understood and shared. It was wonderful how that life-like picture seemed to bring Lloyd before her and give her a delightful sense of companionship, and she fell into the way of "thinking to it," as she expressed it. The things

she would have said aloud had Lloyd been with her, she said mentally, finding a satisfaction in this silent communion that a less imaginative person could not have experienced.

"I wish you could go down to breakfast with me, Princess," she thought, turning for a last glance when she was dressed, and pausing with her hand on the door-knob. "I dread to go down alone before all those strangers."

Dinner, the night before, had been a very stately affair, with Madam at the head of the table in the long banquet hall, and Hawkins in solemn charge of his corps of waiters. But breakfasts were to be delightfully informal, Mary found a few minutes later, when she paused at the dining room door and saw many small round tables, each cozily set for six: five pupils and a teacher. Betty, presiding at one, looked up and beckoned to her.

"You're a trifle early, but come on in. You're to have a seat here by me, with Elise and A.O. just around the corner. Now tell me what has happened to give you that 'glorious morning face,' as Stevenson puts it. You look as if you had found some rare good fortune."

"I have, but I didn't know I showed it." Mary's hands went up to her face as if she expected to feel

the expression that Betty saw. "I am so happy to think that I'm to be at your table. And I'm glad that I can stop playing dumb for awhile. Oh, but it has been funny up in our room this morning. I took your advice, and I want to tell you about it before the other girls come down."

Betty laughed heartily as Mary pictured herself in bed under the umbrella, and smiled understandingly when she told about finding a make-believe chum in Lloyd's picture.

"I know, dear," she answered. "I used to do that way with godmother's picture when I was a lonely little thing at the Cuckoo's nest. I'd whisper my troubles and show her my treasures, and feel that she kept watch over me while I slept. It comforted me many a time, when there was no one else to go to, and is one of my dearest recollections now of those days when I felt so little and lonesome and uncared for."

"How Jack would laugh at me," exclaimed Mary, presently, "if he knew that one of my air-castles had collapsed. He is always teasing me about building sky-scrapers without any foundation. On my way out here Mrs. Stockton told me a lot of stories about her school days. She roomed with the Judge's sister, and she heard so much about

him and he heard so much about her through this sister, that they got to sending messages to each other in her letters. Then they exchanged photographs, and finally they met when he came on the Commencement, and the romance of their lives grew out of it. I kept thinking how romantic it would be to have your brother marry your dearest chum, someone you already loved like a sister — and that if my room-mate turned out to be lovely and sweet and charming, all that I hoped she'd be, how interesting I could make it for Jack. There's no society at all in Lone-Rock, and he never can meet any nice girls as long as he stays there."

"And you don't think he would be interested in Ethelinda?" asked Betty mischievously. "An heiress and a girl with such a distinguished air? She certainly has that even if she doesn't measure up to your standard of beauty. He might be charmed with her. You never can tell what a man is going to like."

"Not that — that — *clam!*" Mary answered warmly, with an expression of disgust. "I know Jack! You've no idea how she can shut herself up in her shell. She never would fit in our family and I know he'd never — "

The signal announcing breakfast made her stop

in the middle of her sentence, for at that same instant the girls began to file in.

"Well, it's goodbye, 'Betty.' I must begin talking to 'Miss Lewis' now." Giving Betty's hand a quick squeeze under the table, she drew herself up sedately.

The Old Girls' Welcome to the New was the chief topic of conversation that morning. It was to take place that night, and as the invitations would not be delivered until the opening of the first mail, every Freshman was in a flutter of expectancy, wondering who her escort was to be.

"I hope mine will be either Cornie Dean or Dorene Derwent," confided Mary to Betty in an undertone, "because I know them so well. But if I should have to choose a stranger I'd rather have that quiet girl in gray, over at Miss Chilton's table. She looks like a girl in an English story-book. I mean the one that Ethelinda is talking to now. And I wish you'd notice how she *is* talking," Mary continued in amazement. "Did you ever see more animation? She's making up for lost time."

"Oh, that's Evelyn Berkeley," answered Betty. "She *is* English; a distant relative of Madam's with such an interesting history. The year I finished school she came in the middle of the spring term,

such a sad-looking creature all in black. Her mother had just died, and her father, who only a short time before had succeeded to the title and estates, sent her over here to be with Madam for awhile. He didn't know what to do with her, as she seemed to be going into a decline. She isn't like the same girl now."

"Oh, is she a real 'My-lady-the-carriage-waits'?" asked Mary, her eyes wide with interest.

"Yes, she belongs to a very ancient and noble family," said Betty, amused at her enthusiasm. "But I thought you were such a little American-revolution patriot that you would not be impressed by anything like that."

"I'm not impressed, exactly," Mary answered stoutly, "but this is the first girl I ever saw who is own daughter to a lord, and it does add a flavour to one's interest in her. Oh, I see, now. *That* is why Ethelinda is so friendly," she added, with sudden intuition of the truth. "She thinks that Miss Berkeley is somebody worth cultivating, and that I'm not."

"Maybe it's a case of 'birds of a feather,'" said Elise, who had heard part of the conversation. "Ethelinda aspires to a family tree and a coat-of-arms, too. I saw her box of stationery spilled out

over your table when I was in your room yesterday, and it had quite an imposing crest on the paper — a unicorn or griffin or something, pawing away at a crown."

Mary pursed her lips together thoughtfully. "That might explain it. Maybe she thinks I'm only a sort of wild North American Indian because our place is named Ware's Wigwam, and that it is beneath her dignity to be intimate with her inferiors. But if that is what is the matter, she's just a snob, and can't be very sure of her own position."

"She is only sixteen," Betty reminded her, "even if she does look so mature and imposing. "I have an idea that the way she has been brought up is responsible for her attitude now. "It has given her a false standard of values. Now, Mary, here is a chance for you to do some real missionary work, and teach her that *'the rank is but the guinea's stamp,'* and that we're all pure gold, 'for a' that and a' that,' no matter if we are not members of the British peerage."

"I wouldn't mind telling her anything if she were a real heathen," was Mary's earnest answer. "But trying to break through her reserve is a harder task than butting a hole through the Chinese wall. You've no idea how haughty she is. Well, I don't care — much."

She cared enough, however, to take a lively interest in her room-mate's pedigree, after seeing the crest on her note paper. Later in the morning when some literature references made it necessary for her to go to the library, she looked around for a certain fat volume she had pored over several times during those idle days before the beginning of school. It was Burke's Peerage. She had looked into it because of the story of Edryn, finding many mottoes as interesting as the one in the great amber window on the stairs. Now she turned to the B's and rapidly scanned the columns till she came to the Berkeleys. For generations there had been an Evelyn in the family. What a long, long time they had had to shape their lives by their motto, and grow worthy of their family traditions! No wonder that Evelyn had that air of gentle breeding and calm poise like Madam Chartley's.

Mary had already on a previous occasion looked in vain for the name of Ware, and when she failed to find it, consoled herself with the thought that for three hundred years it had been handed down with honour in the annals of New England. Staunch patriots the Wares had been in the old colony days, sturdy and stern of conscience, and Mary had been taught to believe that their struggle to wrest a liv-

ing from the rocky hills while they built up a state was as worthy of honour as any knightly deed of the Round Table. She was prouder of those early ancestors who delved and spun and toiled with their hands at yeoman tasks, than the later ones, who were ministers and judges and college professors.

Until now she had never attached any importance to the fact that a branch of her mother's family had been a titled one, because she was such a patriotic little American, and because so many years had elapsed since that particular branch had severed its connection with the family in the old world. But now Mary felt a peculiar thrill of satisfaction when she found the name in the peerage and realized that some of the blue blood which had inspired those great-great-grandfathers to knightly deeds was coursing through her own veins. The crest was a winged spur, with the motto, "Ready, aye ready."

"Maybe that is the reason the 'King's call' has come to me as it did to Edryn," she mused, her chin in her hand and her eyes gazing dreamily out of the window. Then she forgot all about her quest for the literature references, for in her revery she was listening to the Voices again, and seeing herself in a dimly foreshadowed future, the centre of an acclaiming crowd. What great part she was to play

she did not know, but when the time should come for the fulfilment of her high destiny, she would rise to meet it like the winged spur, crying "Ready, aye ready," as all those brave ancestors had done. It was in the blood to respond thus.

The hunter's horn on the terrace outside, sounding the call to recreation, roused her from her day-dreams, and she came to herself with a start. But before she hurried away to the office where the mail was being distributed, she made a quick survey of the H's. To her surprise the name of Hurst was not among them. She fairly ran down the stairs to report her discovery to Elise.

When the invitations for the evening were all distributed Mary went up stairs wailing out her consternation to A.O. She was to be escorted by Jane Ridgeway, the most dignified senior in the school.

"She's the kind that knows such an awful lot, and you have to be on your p's and q's with her every single minute. Cornie says her father is in the Cabinet, and her mother is a shining intellectual light. And now that I've been warned beforehand, I'll not be able to utter a syllable of sense; I know that I'll just gibber."

When she went to her room to dress for the occa-

sion that night there was a great bunch of hot-house roses waiting for her with Jane's card. She knew from the other girls' description of this opening festivity that the seniors spared no expense on this occasion, but it rather overawed her to receive such an extravagant offering. She looked across at the modest bunch of white and purple violets which had come from the Warwick Hall conservatory for Ethelinda, and wondered if there had not been some mistake. Then to her surprise, Ethelinda, who had noticed her glance, spoke to her.

"Sweet, aren't they! Miss Berkeley sent them, or rather Lady Evelyn, I should say. She is to be my escort to-night."

It was Mary's besetting sin to put people right whom she thought were mistaken, so she answered hastily, "Oh, no! You oughtn't to call her Lady Evelyn. She doesn't like it. She wants to be just like the other girls as long as she is in an American school."

Ethelinda drew herself up with a stare, and asked in a patronizing tone that nettled Mary:

"May I ask how *you* happen to know so much about her?"

Equally lofty in her manner, and in a tone comically like Ethelinda's, Mary answered, "You may.

Miss Lewis gave me that bit of information, and for the rest I looked her up in Burke's Peerage. She comes of a very illustrious and noble family, so of course she feels perfectly sure of her position, and doesn't have to draw the lines about herself to preserve her dignity as some people do. Cornie Dean was telling me about a girl who was in the school last year who made such a fuss about her pedigree that she couldn't be friends with more than three of the girls. The rest weren't high enough caste for her. She sported a crest and all that, and they found out that she hadn't a particle of right to it. Her father had struck it rich in some lumber deal, and *bought* a gallery of ancestral portraits, and paid a man a small fortune to fix him up a coat of arms. She had no end of money, but she wasn't the real thing, and Cornie says that paste diamonds won't go down with *this* school. They can spot them every time."

Ethelinda made no comment for a moment, but presently asked in a strained tone, "Did you have any doubts of Miss Berkeley's claims? Is that why you looked her up in the peerage?"

"No," said Mary, honestly. "I was looking for my own name. But there wasn't a single Ware in it. And then" — she couldn't resist this thrust,

especially as she felt it was a part of the missionary work she had undertaken — "I looked for Hurst, too, as the girls said you had a crest."

"Well?" came the question, a trifle defiantly.

"It's not in the Peerage."

Ethelinda drew herself up haughtily as if she disdained an explanation, yet felt forced to make one. "It is not my father's crest I use," she announced. It came from back in my mother's family."

"Oh!" said Mary, with significant emphasis. "I see!" Then she added cheerfully, "I could have one, too, on a count like *that,* way back among my great-grandmothers. But I wouldn't have any real right to it. You have to be in the direct line of descent, you know, and it is silly for us Americans to try to hang on by a hair to the main trunk of the family tree, when all the world knows we belong on the outside branches."

There was no answer to this and the dressing proceeded in a silence as profound as the morning's, until Mary saw that Ethelinda was struggling in a frantic effort to free herself from the hooks of her dress which had caught in her hair.

"Wait," she called, hurrying to the rescue. "Let me hook it for you. What a perfect dream of a gown it is!" she added in frank admiration,

as she deftly fastened it up the back. "It looks like the kind in the fairy tales that are woven out of moon-beams. Here, let me fix your hair, where the hooks pulled it loose."

She tucked in the straggling locks with a few soft pets and touches which, with the compliment, mollified Ethelinda a trifle in spite of her resentment over the former speech. But it still rankled, and she could not forbear saying a little spitefully, "Thanks! What a soft, light touch you have. Quite like a maid I had last year. By the way, her name was Mary. And it was awfully funny. It happened at that time that every maid in the house was named that, and whenever mamma called 'Mary' five or six of them would come running. I used to tell my maid that if I had as common a name as that I'd change it."

Something in the way she said it set Mary's teeth on edge. She had never known any one before who purposely said disagreeable things. She often said them herself in her blundering, impetuous way, but was heartily sorry as soon as they were uttered. Now for the first time in her life she wanted to retaliate by saying the meanest thing she could think of. So she answered, hotly, "Oh, I don't know. I'd rather be named Mary

than a name that means *noble snake,* like Ethelinda."

"Who told you it means that?" was Ethelinda's astonished demand. "I don't believe it."

"You've only to consult Webster," was the dignified reply. "I looked your name up in the dictionary the day I first heard it. Ethel means noble, but Ethelinda means noble *snake.* I suppose nobody ever calls you just *Inda,*" she added meaningly.

Ethelinda's eyes flashed, but she had no answer for this queer girl who seemed to have the Dictionary and the Peerage and no telling how many other sources of information at her tongue's end.

Again the dressing went on in silence. Mary finished first, all but a hook or two which she could not reach, and which she could not muster up courage to ask Ethelinda to do for her. Finally, gathering up her armful of roses, she went across the hall to ask Dorene's assistance.

"Why, of course!" she cried, opening the door wide at Mary's knock. "You poor child! Think of having a room-mate who is such a Queen of Sheba she couldn't do a little thing like that for you!"

"But I didn't ask her," Mary hurried to explain, eager to be perfectly honest. "I had just made

such a mean remark to her that I hadn't the courage to ask a favour."

"*You!*" laughed Cornie. "I can't imagine a good natured little puss like you saying anything very savage to anybody."

"But I did," confessed Mary. "I *wanted* to hurt her feelings. I fairly ached to do it. I should have said something meaner still if I could have thought of it quick enough. Isn't it awful? Only the second day of the term to have things come to such a pass! Everything we do seems to rub the other's fur up the wrong way."

"I'd ask Madam to change me to some other room," said Dorene, but Mary resented the suggestion.

"No, indeed! I'll not have it said that I was such a fuss-cat as all that. I'll make myself get along with her."

"Well, I don't envy you the task," was Cornie's rejoinder. I never can resist the temptation to take people down when they get high and mighty. I heard her telling one of the girls at the breakfast table that she'd never ridden on a street-car in all her life till she came to Washington. She made Fanchon take her across the city in one instead of calling a carriage as they always do. They have a

garage full of machines at home, and I don't know how many horses. She said it in a way to make people who had always ridden in public conveyances feel mighty plebeian and poor-folksy, although she insisted that street-cars are lots of fun. 'They give you a funny sensation when they stop.' Those were her very words."

"Well, of all things!" cried Mary, then after a moment's silent musing, "It never struck me before, what different worlds we have been brought up in. But if a street-car ride is as much of a novelty to her as an automobile ride would be to me, I don't wonder that she spoke about it. I know I'd talk about my sensations in an auto if I'd ever been in one, and it wouldn't be bragging, either. Maybe all our other experiences have been just as different," she went on, her judicial mind trying to look at life from Ethelinda's view-point, in order to judge her fairly.

"I wonder what sort of a girl I would have been, if instead of always having the Wolf at the door, we'd have had bronze lions guarding the portals, and all the money that heart could wish."

"Money!" sniffed Cornie. "It isn't that that makes the difference in Ethelinda. Look at Alta

Westman, a million in her own right. There isn't a sweeter, jollier, friendlier girl in the school."

"Any way," continued Mary, "I'd like to be able to put myself in Ethelinda's place for about an hour, and see how things look to her — especially how *I* look to her. I'm glad I thought about that. It will make it easier for me to get along with her, for it will help me to make allowances for lots of things."

The door stood ajar, and catching sight of Jane Ridgeway coming up the hall, Mary started to meet her.

"Remember," called Cornie after her. "We've taken you under our wing, and claim you for our sorority. We're not going to have any of the Lloydsboro Valley girls imposed on, and if she gets too uppity she'll find herself boycotted."

As the door closed behind her Dorene remarked, "She's a dear little thing. I'm going to see that she has so much attention to-night that Ethelinda will wake up to the fact that she's worth having for a friend. I'm going to ask Evelyn Berkeley to make a special point of being nice to her."

The thought that Cornie considered her one of the Lloydsboro girls sent Mary away with a pleasurable thrill that made her cheeks glow all eve-

ning. There was something in the donning of party clothes that always loosened her tongue, and conscious of looking her best she plunged into the festivity of the hour with such evident enjoyment that others naturally gravitated towards her to share it.

"Congratulations!" whispered Betty, happening to pass her towards the close of the evening. "You're quite one of the belles of the ball."

"Isn't it simply perfect?" sighed Mary, her face beaming.

Herr Vogelbaum had just come in and was settling himself at the piano, in place of the musicians who had been performing. This was an especial treat not on the programme, and all that was needed in Mary's opinion to complete a heavenly evening. He played the same improvisation that had caught her up in its magic spell the day of her arrival, and she went to her room in the uplifted frame of mind which finds everything perfection. Even her strained relations with Ethelinda seemed a trifle, the tiniest thorn in a world full of roses. Her last waking thought was a resolution to be so good and patient that even that thorn should disappear in time.

Mary's popularity was not without its effect upon Ethelinda, especially the Lady Evelyn's evident in-

terest in her. It argued that she was worth knowing. Then, too, it would have been a hard heart which could have steeled itself against Mary's persistent efforts to be friendly. It was a tactful effort also, making her daily put herself in Ethelinda's place and consider everything from her viewpoint before speaking. Many a time it helped her curb her active little tongue, and many a time it helped her to condone the one fault which particularly irritated her.

"Of course it is hard for her to keep her half of the room in order," she would say to herself. "She's always had a maid to wait on her, and has never been obliged to pick up even her own stockings. She doesn't know how to be neat, and probably I shouldn't, either, if I hadn't been so carefully trained."

Then she would hang the rumpled skirts back in the wardrobe where they belonged, rescue her overturned work-basket from some garment that Ethelinda had carelessly thrown across it, and patiently straighten out the confusion of books and papers on the table they shared in common. Although there were no more frozen silences between them their conversations were far from satisfactory. They were totally uncongenial. But after the first

week, that part of their relationship did not affect Mary materially. She was too happily absorbed in the work and play of school life, throwing herself into every recitation, every excursion and every experience with a zest that left no time for mourning over what might have been. At bed-time there was always her shadow-chum to share the recollections of the day. One of her letters to Joyce gave a description of the state of resignation to which she finally attained.

"Think of it!" she wrote. "Me with my Puritan conscience and big bump of order, and my r.m. calmly embroidering this Sabbath afternoon! Her dressing table, her bed and the chairs look like rubbish heaps. Her bed-room slippers in the middle of the floor this time of day make me want to gnash my teeth. Really it is a disaster to live with some one who scrambles her things in with yours all the time. The disorder gets on my nerves some days till I want to scream. There are times when I think I shall be obliged to rise up in my wrath like old Samson, and smite her 'hip and thigh with a great slaughter.'

"In most things I have been able to 'compromise.' Margaret Elwood, one of the Juniors, taught me that. She tried it with one of her room-

mates, now happily a back number. Margaret said this girl loved cheap perfumes, for instance, and she herself loathed them. So she filled all the drawers and wardrobes with those nasty camphor moth-balls, which the r.m. couldn't endure, and when she protested, Margaret offered a compromise. She would cut out the moth-balls, even at the expense of having her clothes ruined, if the r.m. would swear off on musk and the like.

"I tried that plan to break E. of keeping the light on when I was sleepy. One night I lay awake until I couldn't stand it any longer, and then began to hum in a low, droning chant, sort of under my breath, like an exasperating mosquito: '*Laugh*-ing *wa*-ter! *Big* chief's *daugh*-ter!' till I nearly drove my own self distracted. I could see her frown and change her position as if she were terribly annoyed, and after I had hummed it about a thousand times she asked, 'For heaven's sake, Mary, is there anything that will induce you to stop singing that thing? I can't read a word.'

"'Why, yes,' I answered sweetly. 'Does it annoy you? I was only singing to pass the time till you turn off the light. I can't sleep a wink. We'll just compromise.'

"She turned it out in a jiffy and didn't say a

word, but I notice that she pays attention to the signals now, and does her reading before they sound 'taps.' All this is teaching yours truly a wonderful amount of self control, and I have come to the conclusion that everything at Warwick Hall, disagreeables and all, are working together for my good."

So matters went on for several weeks. Mary meekly hung up Ethelinda's dresses and put the room in order whenever it was disarranged, and Ethelinda, always accustomed to being waited upon, took it as a service due her from one whom necessity had placed in a position always to serve. If she had accepted it silently Mary might have gone on to the end of the term making excuses for her, and making good her neglect; but Ethelinda remarked one day to one of the Sophomores that if Mary Ware ever wanted a recommendation as lady's maid she would gladly give it. She seemed naturally cut out for that.

The remark was repeated without loss of time, and in the same patronizing tone in which it was made. Mary's boasted self-control flew to the four winds. She was half way down the stairs when she heard it, but turning abruptly she marched back to her room, her cheeks red and her eyes blazing. Throwing open the door she gave one glance around

" INSTEAD, IT SEEMED AS IF A SMALL CYCLONE SWEPT THROUGH THE ROOM."

the room. The disorder happened to be a little worse than usual. A wet umbrella leaned against her bed, and Ethelinda's damp coat lay across the white counterpane, for she had been walking in the rain, and had thrown them down in the most convenient spot on entering. Other articles were scattered about promiscuously, but Mary made no attempt as usual to put them in place.

Instead, it seemed as if a small cyclone swept through the room. The wet umbrella was sent flying across to Ethelinda's bed. Gloves, coat, and handsome plumed hat followed, regardless of where they lit, or in what condition. Half a dozen books went next, tumbling pell mell into a corner. Then Ethelinda's bed-room slippers, over which Mary was always stumbling, hurtled through the air, and an ivory hair-brush that had been left on her dressing-table. They whizzed perilously near Ethelinda's head.

"There!" exclaimed Mary, choking back the angry tremble in her voice. "I'm worn out trying to keep this room in order for order's sake! The next time I find your things on my side of the room I'll pitch them out of the window! It's no excuse at all to say that you've always had somebody to wait on you. You've always had your two

hands, too. A *lady* is supposed to have some sense of her own obligations and of other people's rights. Now don't you *dare* get on my side again!"

With her knees trembling under her till she could scarcely move, Mary ran out of the room, so frightened by what she had done that she did not venture back till bedtime. Ethelinda refused to speak to her for several days, but the outburst of temper had two good results. One was that there was no need for its repetition, and Ethelinda treated her with more respect from then on.

It had come to her with a shock, that Mary was looking down on *her,* Ethelinda Hurst, pitying her for some things and despising her for others; and though she shrugged her shoulders at first and was angry at the thought, she found herself many a time trying to measure up to Mary's standards. She couldn't bear for those keen gray eyes to look her through, as if they were weighing her in the balance and finding her wanting.

CHAPTER V

A FAD AND A CHRISTMAS FUND

For a Freshman to start a fad popular enough to spread through the entire school was an unheard of thing at Warwick Hall, but A.O. Miggs had that distinction early in the term. Her birthday was in October, and when she appeared that morning with a zodiac ring on her little finger, set with a brilliant fire opal, there was a mingled outcry of admiration and horror.

"Oh, I wouldn't wear an opal for worlds!" cried one superstitious girl. "They're dreadfully unlucky."

"Not if it is your birthstone," announced A.O., calmly turning her hand to watch the flashing of red and blue lights in the heart of the gem. "It's bad luck *not* to wear one if you were born in October. It says on the card that came in the box with this:

> "'October's child is born for woe
> And life's vicissitudes must know,
> Unless she wears the opal's charm
> To ward off every care and harm.'

"And they say too that you are beloved of the gods and men as long as you keep your faith in it."

"Then I'll certainly have to get one," laughed Jane Ridgeway, who had joined the group, "for I am October's child. Let me see it, A.O."

She adjusted her glasses and took the plump little hand in hers for inspection. "I always have thought that opals are the prettiest of all the stones. Write the verse out for me, A.O., that's a good child. I'll send it home for the family to see how important it is that I should be protected by such a charm."

This from a senior, the dignified and exclusive Miss Ridgeway, put the seal of approval on the fashion, and when, a week later, she appeared with a beautiful Hungarian opal surrounded by tiny diamonds, with her zodiac signs engraved on the wide circle of gold, every girl in school wanted a birthmonth ring.

Elise wrote home asking if agates were expensive, and if she might have one. Not that she thought they were pretty, but it was the stone for June, so of course she ought to wear one. The answer came in the shape of an old heirloom, a Scotch agate that had been handed down in the family, almost

since the days of Malcolm the Second. It had been a small brooch, worn on the bosom of many a proud MacIntyre dame, but never had it evoked such interest as when, set in a ring, it was displayed on Elise's little finger.

After that there was a general demand for a jeweller's catalogue which appeared in their midst about that time. One page was devoted to illustrations of such stones with a rhyme for each month. The firm which issued the catalogue would have been surprised at the rush of orders had they not had previous dealings with Girls' Schools. The year before there had been almost as great a demand for tiny gold crosses, and the year before for huge silver horse-shoes. This year the element of superstition helped to swell the orders. When the verse said,

> "The August born, without this stone,
> 'Tis said must live unloved and lone,"

of course no girl born in August would think of living a week longer without a sardonyx, especially when the catalogue offered the genuine article as low as $2.75. The daughters of April and May, July and September had to pay more for their privileges, but they did it gladly. When Cornie Dean read,

"Who wears an emerald all her life
Shall be a loved and honoured wife,"

she sold her pet bangle bracelet that afternoon for ten dollars, and added half her month's allowance to buy an emerald large enough to hold some potency.

Mary pored over the catalogue longingly when it came her turn to have it. She liked her verse:

"Who on this world of ours their eyes
In March first open shall be wise.
In days of peril firm and brave,
And wear a bloodstone to their grave."

When she had considered sizes and prices for awhile she took out her bank book and Christmas list and began comparing them anxiously. Betty, coming into the room presently, found her so absorbed in her task that she did not notice the open letter Betty carried, and the gay samples of chiffon and silk fluttering from the envelope. She looked up with a little puckered smile as Betty drew a chair to the opposite side of the table, asking as she seated herself, "What's the matter? You seem to be in some difficulty."

"It's just the same old wolf at the door," said Mary, soberly. "I have enough for this term's expenses, all the necessary things, but there's nothing

for the extras. There isn't a single person I can cut off my Christmas list. I've put down what I've decided to make for each one, and what the bare materials will cost, and although I've added it up and added it down, it always comes out the same; nothing left to get the ring with."

She sat jabbing her pencil into the paper for a moment. "I wish there were ways to earn money here as there are at some schools. There are so many things I need it for. They'll expect me to contribute something to the mock Christmas tree fund, and I want to get Jack something nice. I couldn't take his own money to buy him a present even if there were enough, which there isn't. I've already made him everything I know how to make, that he can use, and men don't care for things they can't use, but that are just pretty, as girls do. Just look what a beauty bright of a watch-fob I've found in this catalogue."

She turned the pages eagerly. "It is a bloodstone. The very thing for Jack, for his birthday is in March, too, and it is such a dark, unpretentious stone that he would like it. *But* — it costs eight dollars."

She said it in an awed tone as if she were naming a small fortune.

"Maybe we can think of some way for you to earn it," said Betty, encouragingly. "I'll set my wits to work this evening as soon as I've finished looking over the A class themes. Because none of the girls has ever done such a thing before in the school is no reason why you should not. Look! This is what I came in to show you."

It was several pages from Lloyd's last letter, and the samples of some new dresses she was having made. For a little space the wolf at the door drew in its claws, and Mary forgot her financial straits. Early in the term Betty had divined how much the sharing of this correspondence meant to Mary. She could not fail to see how eagerly she followed the winsome princess through her gay social season in town, rejoicing over her popularity, interested in everything she did and wore and treasuring every mention of her in the home papers. The old Colonel sent Betty the *Courier-Journal,* and the society page was regularly turned over to Mary. There was a corner in her scrap-book marked, "My Chum," rapidly filling with accounts of balls, dinners and house-parties at which she had been a guest. This last letter had several messages in it for Mary, so Betty left the page containing them with her, knowing they would be folded away in the scrap-

book with the samples, as soon as her back was turned.

"I was out at Anchorage for this last week-end," ran one of the messages. "And it rained so hard one night that what was to have been an informal dance was turned into an old-fashioned candy-pull. Not more than half a dozen guests managed to get there. Tell Mary that I tried to distinguish myself by making some of that Mexican pecan candy that they used to have such success with at the Wigwam. But it was a flat failure, and I think I must have left out some important ingredient. Ask her to please send me the recipe if she can remember it."

"Probably it failed because she didn't have the real Mexican sugar," said Mary, at the end of the reading. "It comes in a cone, wrapped in a queer kind of leaf, so I'm sure she didn't have it. I'll write out the recipe as soon as I get back from my geometry recitation, and add a foot-note, explaining about the sugar."

Somehow it was hard for Mary to keep her mind on lines and angles that next hour. She kept seeing a merry group in the Wigwam kitchen. Lloyd and Jack and Phil Tremont were all ranged around the white table, cracking pecans, and picking out the firm full kernels, while Joyce presided over the bub-

bling kettle on the stove. She wondered if Lloyd had enjoyed her grown-up party as much as she had that other one, when Jack said such utterly ridiculous things in pigeon English, like the old Chinese vegetable man, and Phil cake-walked and parodied funny coon-songs till their sides ached with laughing.

At the close of the recitation a hastily scribbled note from Betty was handed to her.

"I have just found out," it ran, "that Mammy Easter will be unable to furnish her usual pralines and Christmas sweets to her Warwick Hall customers this year. Why don't you try your hand at that Mexican candy Lloyd mentioned. If the girls once get a taste it will be 'advertised by its loving friends' and you can sell quantities. I am going to the city this afternoon, and can order the sugar for you. If they wire the order you ought to be able to get it within a week. *E. S.*"

Mary went up stairs two steps at a bound, stepping on the front of her dress at every other jump, and only saving herself from sprawling headlong as she reached the top, by catching at A.O., who ran into her on the way down. She could not get back to her bank book and her Christmas list soon enough, to see how much cash she had on hand, and

compute how much she dared squeeze out to invest in material.

A week later the Domestic Science room was turned over to her during recreation hour, and presently a delicious odour began to steal out into the halls, which set every girl within range to sniffing hungrily. Betty explained it to several, and there was no need to do anything more. Every one was on hand for her share when the samples were passed around, and the new business venture was discussed in every room.

"Wouldn't you like to know Jack Ware?" asked Dorene of Cornie, her mouth so full of the delicious sweets that she could only mumble. "Any man who can inspire such adoration in his own sister must be nothing short of a wonder."

"I feel that I do know him," responded Cornie. "That I am quite well acquainted with him, in fact. And I quite approve of 'my brother Jack.' It's queer, too, for usually when you hear a person quoted morning, noon and night you get so that you want to scream when his name is mentioned. Now there's Babe Meadows. Will you ever forget the way she rang the changes on 'my Uncle Willie'? I used to quote that line from Tennyson under my breath — *"A quinsy choke thy cursèd note!'* It

was 'Uncle Willie says this isn't good form' and 'Uncle Willie says they don't do that in England' till you got worn to a frazzle having that old Anglomaniac eternally thrown at your head. But the more Mary quotes Jack the better you like him."

"I wonder how he feels about Mary taking this way to earn his Christmas present."

"Oh, of course he doesn't know she is doing it, and of course he wouldn't like it if he did. But he'd have hard work stopping her. She is as full of energy and determination as a locomotive with a full head of steam on, and I imagine he's exactly like her. She fondly imagines that he will be governor of Arizona some day."

"There!" exclaimed Dorene. "That suggests the dandiest thing for us to put on the mock Christmas tree for her. A Jack-in-the-box! She's always springing him on an unsuspecting public, and just about as unexpectedly as those little mannikins bob up. She has used him so often to 'point her morals and adorn her tales' that every girl in school will see the joke."

"Well, the future governor of Arizona will get his bloodstone fob all right as far as my patronage will help," said Cornie, when she had laughingly applauded Dorene's suggestion. She carefully

picked up the last crumb. "I shall speak for three pounds of this right off. Papa has such a sweet tooth that he'd a thousand times rather have a box of this than a dozen silk mufflers and shaving cases and such things that usually fall to a man's lot at Christmas."

If the girls in this exclusive school thought it strange that one of their number should start a money-making enterprise, no whisper of it reached Mary. Her sturdy independence forbade any air of patronage, and she was such a general favourite that whatever she did was passed over with a laugh. The few who might have been inclined to criticize found it an unpopular thing to do. The object for which she was working enlisted every one's interest. Jack would have ground his teeth with mortification had he known that every girl in school was interested in his getting a bloodstone watch-fob in his Christmas stocking, and daily discussed the means by which it was being procured.

Orders came in rapidly, and Mary spent every spare moment in cracking pecans, and picking out the kernels so carefully that they fell from the shells in unbroken halves. It was a tedious undertaking and even her study hours were encroached upon. Not that she ever neglected a lesson for the sake

of the pecans, for, as she said to Elise, "I've set my heart on taking the valedictory for Jack's sake, and of course I couldn't sacrifice that ambition for all the watch-fobs in the catalogue. He wouldn't want one at that price. But I've found that I can pick out nuts and learn French verbs at the same time. If you and A.O. will come up to the Dom. Sci. this afternoon at four thirty, and not let any of the other girls know, I'll let you scrape the kettle and eat the scraps that crumble from the corners when I cut the squares. But I can not let any one in while I'm measuring and boiling. I couldn't afford to make a mistake."

Promptly at the time set, the girls tapped for admission, for there was no denying the drawing qualities of Mary's wares. The pun was common property in the school.

"Elise," said A.O., pausing in her critical tasting, when they had been at it some time. "I really believe that this is better than Huyler's hot fudge Sun-balls. And it is lots better than the candy that Lieutenant Logan sent you last week."

Elise made a face expressing both surprise and reproof. "Considering that you ate the lion's share of it, Miss Miggs, that speech is neither pretty nor polite."

"I wonder," continued A.O., paying no attention to her, "if the Lieutenant knows what a public benefactor he is, when he sends you bon-bons and books and things." She had enjoyed his many offerings to Elise as much as the recipient and thought it wise to follow her first speech with a compliment.

"Well, Agnes Olive, if you feel that you have profited so much by his benefactions, then you are not playing fair if you don't invite some of us down to meet your 'special,' when he comes next week. Mary, what do you think? A.O. has a *suitor!* A boy from home. He is to come next week, armed with a note from her 'fond payrents,' giving him permission to call. After talking about him all term and getting my curiosity up to fever heat about such a paragon as she makes him out to be, she blasts all my hopes by flatly refusing to let me meet him. Pig!" she made a grimace of mock disgust at A.O.

"I wouldn't care, if you weren't such an awful tease," admitted A.O. "But I know how you'll criticize him afterward. You'll make a byword of everything he said and quote it to me till kingdom come. *You* know how it would be, don't you, Mary?" turning to her. "You wouldn't want her taking notes on everything he said if you had a — a — a friend —"

" ' Oh, call it by some better name, for friendship sounds too cold,' " interrupted Elise.

" Well, I haven't any a — a — whatever it is Elise wants to call it," said Mary, laughing. " I only wish I had. I've always thought it would be nice to have one, but I suppose I'll have to go to the end of my days singing: ' Every lassie has her laddie, Nane they say hae I.' That has always seemed such a sad song to me."

" Oh, oh! " cried Elise, perversely, who seemed to be in a mood for teasing everybody. She pointed an accusing spoon at her before putting it back in her mouth.

" What about Phil Tremont, I'd like to know! He saved her from an Indian once, A.O., out on the desert. It was dreadfully romantic. And when he was best man at Eugenia Forbes's wedding, and Mary was flower girl, Mary got the shilling that was in the bride's cake. It was an old English shilling, coined in the reign of Bloody Mary, with Philip's and Mary's heads on it. That is a sure sign they were meant for each other. Phil said right out at the table before everybody that fate had ordered that he should be the lucky man. Mary has that shilling this blessed minute, put away in her purse for a pocket piece, and she carries it every-

where she goes. I saw it yesterday when she was looking in her purse for a key, and she got as red as — as red as she is this minute."

Elise finished gleefully, elated with the success of her teasing. "My! How you are blushing, Mary. Look at her, A.O." Her dark eyes twinkled mischievously as she sang in a meaning tone:

"Amang the train there is a swain
I dearly lo'e mysel'.
But what's his name or where's his hame
I dinna choose to tell."

"I'm not blushing," protested Mary, hotly. "And it is silly to talk that way when everybody knows that Phil Tremont never cared anything for any girl except Lloyd Sherman."

"Maybe not at one time," insisted Elise. "And neither did Lieutenant Logan care about any girl but my beloved sister Allison at one time. I'm not mentioning names, but you know very well that she's not the one he is crazy about now. Just wait till fate brings you and Phil together again. You'll probably meet him during the Christmas vacation if you go to New York."

Mary made no answer, only thrust a knife under the edge of the candy in the largest plate, as if her

sole interest in life was testing its hardness. Then she spread out several sheets of paraffine paper with a great show of indifference. It had its effect on Elise, and she promptly changed her target back to A.O. There was no fun in teasing when her arrows made no impression.

Usually A. O. enjoyed it, but she had tangled herself in a web of her own weaving lately, and for the last few days had been in terror lest Elise should find her out. Inspired by the picture of the handsome young lieutenant on Elise's desk, and not wanting to seem behind her room-mate in romantic experiences, silly little A.O. had drawn on her imagination for most of the confidences she gave in exchange. When Elise talked of the lieutenant, A.O. talked of "Jimmy," adding this trait and that grace until she had built up a beautiful ideal, but a being so different from the original on which she based her tales, that Jimmy himself would never have recognized her dashing hero as the bashful fellow he was accustomed to confront in his mirror.

He had carried her lunch basket when they went to school together, he had patiently worked the sums on her slate with his big clumsy fingers when she cried over the mysteries of subtraction. Later,

when shy and overgrown, and too bashful to speak his admiration, he had followed her around at picnics and parties with a dog-like devotion that touched her. He had sent her valentines and Christmas cards, and at the last High School commencement when the graduating exercises marked the parting of their ways, he had presented her with a photograph album bound in celluloid, with a bunch of atrociously gaudy pansies and forget-me-nots painted thereon.

In matching stories with Elise, the album and his awkwardness and his plodding embarrassed speech somehow slipped into the background, and it was his devotion and his chivalry she enlarged upon. Elise, impressed by her hints and allusions, believed in the idealized Jimmy as thoroughly as A.O. intended she should.

For several days A.O. had been in a quandary, for her mother's last letter had announced a danger which had never entered her thoughts as being imminent. "Jimmy Woods will be in Washington soon. He is going up with his uncle, who has some business at the patent office. I have given him a note to Madam Chartley, granting him my permission to call on you. He is in an agony of apprehension over the trip to Warwick Hall. He is so afraid of

meeting strange girls. But I tell him it will be good for him. It is really amusing to see how interested everybody in town is over Jimmy's going. Do be kind to the poor fellow for the sake of your old childish friendship, no matter if he does seem a bit countrified and odd. He is a dear good boy, and it would never do to let him feel slighted or unwelcome."

When A.O. read that, much as she liked Jimmy Woods, she wished that the ground would open and swallow him before he could get to Washington, or else that it had opened and swallowed her before she drew such a picture of him for Elise to admire. There were only two ways out of the dilemma that she could see: confession or a persistent refusal to let her see him. She must not even be allowed to hang over the banister and watch him pass through the hall, as she had proposed doing.

The more she persisted in her refusal the more determined Elise was to see him. A.O. imagined she could feel herself growing thin and pale from so much lying awake of nights to invent some excuse to circumvent her. If she only knew what day Jimmy was to be in Washington she could arrange to meet him there. So she could plan a trip to the dentist with Miss Gilmer, the trained nurse, as

chaperon. She wouldn't have minded introducing him to Elise if she had never painted him to her in such glowing colours as her hero. She wished she hadn't told her it was Jimmy who was coming. She could have called him by his middle name, Gordon — Mr. Gordon, and passed him off as some ordinary acquaintance in whom Elise could have no possible interest.

It was a relief when Elise turned her attention to Mary's affairs, and when she saw that her turn was coming again, she set her teeth together grimly, determined to make no answer.

Presently, to her surprise, Elise relapsed into silence, and stood looking out of the window, tapping on the kettle with her spoon in a preoccupied way. Then she laughed suddenly as if she saw something funny, and being questioned, refused to give the reason.

"I just thought of something," she said, laughing again. "Something too funny for words. I'll have to go now," she added, as if the cause of her mysterious mirth was in some way responsible for her departure.

"Thanks mightily for the candy, Mary. It's the best ever. You're going to be overflowed with orders, I'm sure. Well, farewell friends and fellow citizens. I'll see you later."

"What do you supose it was that made her laugh so," asked A.O., suspiciously. "There's always some mischief brewing when she acts that way. I don't dare leave her by herself a minute for fear she'll plot something against me. I'll have to be going, too, Mary."

Left to herself, Mary began washing the utensils she had used. By the time she had removed every trace of her candy-making, the confections set out on the window sill in the wintry air were firm and hard, all ready to be wrapped in the squares of paraffine paper and packed in the boxes waiting for them. She whistled softly as she drew in the plates, but stopped with a start when she realized that it was Elise's song she was echoing:

> "Amang the train there is a swain
> I dearly lo'e mysel'."

"It must be awfully nice," she mused, "to have somebody as devoted to you as the Lieutenant is to Elise and Jimmy is to A.O. If I were A.O. I wouldn't care if the whole school came down to meet him. I'd *want* them to see him. I made up my mind at Eugenia's wedding that it was safer to be an old maid, but I'd hate to be one without ever having had an 'affair' like other girls. It must be

lovely to be called the Queen of Hearts like Lloyd, and to have such a train of admirers as Mister Rob and Mister Malcolm and Phil and all the others."

There was a wistful look in the gray eyes that peered dreamily out of the window into the gathering dusk of the December twilight. But it was not the wintry landscape that she saw. It was a big boyish figure, cake-walking in the little Wigwam kitchen. A handsome young fellow turning in the highroad to wave his hat with a cheery swing to the disconsolate little girl who was flapping a farewell to him with her old white sunbonnet. And then the same face, older grown, smiling at her through the crowds at the Lloydsboro Valley depot, as he came to her with outstretched hands, exclaiming, "Goodbye, little Vicar! Think of the Best Man whenever you look at the Philip on your shilling."

She was thinking of him now so intently that she lost count of the pieces she had packed into the box she was filling with the squares of sweets, and had to empty them all out and begin again. But as she recalled other scenes, especially the time she had overheard a conversation not intended for her about a turquoise he was offering Lloyd, she said to herself, "He is for Lloyd. They are just made for each other, and I am glad that the nicest man I

ever knew happens to like the dearest girl in the world. And I hope if there ever should be 'a swain amang the train' for me, he'll be as near like him as possible. I don't know where I'd ever meet him, though. Certainly not here and most positively not in Lone-Rock."

"Not like other girls," she laughed presently, recalling the title of the book Ethelinda was reading. "That fits me exactly. No Lieutenant, no Jimmy, and no birthstone ring, and no prospect of ever having any. But I don't care — much. The candy is a success and Jack is going to have his bloodstone fob."

With her arms piled full of boxes, she started down to her room. As she opened the door a burst of music came floating out from the gymnasium where the carol-singers were practising for the yearly service. This one was a new carol to her. She did not know the words, but to the swinging measures other words fitted themselves; some lines which she had read that morning in a magazine. She sang them softly in time with the carol-singers as she went on down the stairs:

"For should he come not by the road, and come not by the hill
And come not by the far sea way, *yet come he surely will.*
Close all the roads of all the world, *love's road is open still.*'

CHAPTER VI

JACK'S WATCH - FOB

ELISE spent Saturday and Sunday in Washington with the Claiborne family, and A.O. almost prayed that Jimmy would make his visit in her absence. On her return she had so much to tell that she did not mention his name, and A.O. hoped that he was forgotten. All Monday afternoon she went around in a flutter of nervousness, "feeling in her bones" that Jimmy would be there that night, and afraid that Elise would find some way in which to carry out her threat of seeing him at all hazards. One of the ways she had suggested trying, was to sound a burglar or a fire alarm, so that every one would rush out into the hall. But when the dreaded moment actually arrived and A.O. stood in the middle of the floor with his card in her hand, Elise merely looked up from her book with a provoking grin.

"Oh, haven't I had you going for the last week!" she exclaimed. "Really made you believe that I wanted to see your dear Jimmy-boy! A.O., you

are dead easy! I haven't had so much fun out of anything for ages."

Almost giddy with the sense of relief, A.O. hurried away, leaving Elise poring over her French lesson. At the lower landing she paused to tear Jimmy's card to atoms and drop them in a waste basket which was standing there. Even his card might betray him, for it was not an elegant correct bit of engraved board like the Lieutenant's. It was a large square card inscribed by a professional penman; the kind who sets up stands on street corners or in convenient doorways, and executes showy scrolls and tendrils in the way of initial letters "while you wait."

As the door closed behind A.O., Elise sent her book flying across the room, and the next moment was groping under the bed for a dress-box which she had hidden there. A blond wig that she had bought while in Washington for next week's tableaux tumbled out first, with a motley collection of borrowed articles, which she had been at great pains to procure.

Laughing so that she could hardly dress, Elise began to make a hurried change. Five minutes later she stood before the glass completely disguised. Cornie Dean's long black skirt trailed around her.

A.O.'s own jacket fitted her snugly, with Margaret Elwood's new black feather boa, which had just been sent her from home, hiding the cut of its familiar collar. Jane Ridgeway's second best spectacles covered her mischievous eyes, and a black veil was draped over the small toque and blond hair in such a way that its broad band of crape hid the lower part of her face. As a finishing touch a piece of gold-leaf, pressed over part of an upper front tooth, gave the effect of a large gold filling, whenever she smiled.

She had provided herself with a pair of black gloves, but at the last moment the left-hand glove could not be found. When all her frantic overturnings failed to bring it to light, she gave up the search, not wanting to lose any more valuable time. The little flat feather muff which went with the boa would hide the fact that she had only one glove. Thrusting her bare hand into it, she stopped for only one thing more, a black bordered card, which bore the name in old English type, *Mrs. Robertson Redmond.* It was one which had been sent up to her by one of her mother's friends, who called at the Claiborne's, and was partly responsible for this disguise. It had suggested the black veil with the crape border.

Dodging past several open doors she reached the south corridor in safety and raising the window that opened on a back court, she stepped out on the fire escape. Cornie's long skirt nearly tripped her, and it was no easy matter to cling to the rounds of the iron ladder, with a muff in one hand and her skirts constantly wrapping around her. Luckily she had only one flight to descend. Stopping a moment to smooth her ruffled plumage and get her breath, she walked around to the front of the house, climbed the steps, and boldly lifted the great knocker.

It was a dark, cold night, and the sudden appearance of a lady on the doorstep, so far from the station, astonished the footman who opened the door. He had heard no sound of wheels, and he peered out past her, expecting to see some manly escort emerge from the night. None came. But she was unmistakably a lady, and her mourning costume seemed to furnish the necessary credentials. When she handed him a black-bordered card and asked for Miss Mary Ware of Arizona, with an air of calm assurance and with the broadest of English accents, he bowed obsequiously and ushered her into the drawing room.

In the far end of it Herr Vogelbaum was talking lustily in German to two young men, evidently fel-

low musicians. Otherwise it was deserted, except for A.O., and a bashful, overgrown boy of seventeen, who sat opposite her on a chair far too low for him. It gave him the effect of sprawling, and he was constantly drawing in his long legs and thrusting them out again. The teacher who was to be drawing room chaperon for the evening had not yet come down.

The lady in black glided into the room with the air of being so absorbed in her own affairs that she looked upon the other occupants as she did the furniture. Without even a direct glance at the young people in the corner she swept up to a chair within a few feet of them and sat down to wait. Jimmy, in the midst of some tale about a prank that the High School Invincibles had played on a rival baseball team, faltered, grew confused and finished haltingly. For all her spectacles and crape the golden haired stranger was fascinatingly young and pretty.

A.O. was provoked that her visitor should show to such disadvantage even before this unknown lady who apparently was taking no notice of them. But when he paused she could think of nothing to say herself for a moment or two. Then, to break the silence which was growing painful, she plunged into an account of one of the last escapades of her

wicked room-mate, whom she pictured as a most fascinating, but a desperately reckless creature. It was funny, the way she told it, and it sent Jimmy off into a spasm of mirth. But she would almost rather have bitten her tongue out than to have caused Jimmy to explode in that wild bray of a laugh. He slapped his knee repeatedly, and doubled up as if he could laugh no longer, only to break out in a second bray, louder than the first. It made the gentlemen in the other end of the room look around inquiringly.

A.O. was so mortified she could have cried. Jimmy, feeling the instant change in her manner, and not able to account for it, grew self conscious and ill at ease. The conversation flagged, and presently stopped for such a long time that the lady in black turned a slow glance in their direction.

Meanwhile, Mary Ware, up in the Domestic Science room, was anxiously watching a kettle which refused to come to the proper boiling point, where it could be safely left. What was to be the last batch of her Christmas candy was in that kettle, for she had emptied the last pound of Mexican sugar into it. If it wasn't cooked exactly right it would turn to sugar again when it was cold, and not be of the proper consistency to hold the nuts

together. She did not know what effect it might have on the mixture to set it off the fire while she went down to receive her unknown visitor, and then bring it to the boiling point again after it had once grown cold. She was afraid to run any risks. If the watch-fob was to reach Jack on time, it would have to be started on its way in a few days, and on the success of this last lot of candy depended the getting of the last few dollars necessary to its purchase. She wished that she had ordered more of the sugar in the first place. There wouldn't be time now. She had twice as many orders as she had been able to fill. It would have been so delightful to have gone shopping with a whole pocket full of money which she had earned herself.

She looked at the clock and then back again at the black-bordered card on the table. "Mrs. Robertson Redmond." She had never heard of her. Burning with curiosity, she tried to imagine what possible motive the stranger had for calling. It was unpardonable that a mere school-girl should keep a lady waiting so long; a lady in mourning, too, who since she could not be making social calls, must have a very important reason for coming. Fidgeting with impatience she bent over the kettle, testing the hot liquid once more by dropping a spoonful into a

cup of cold water. Still it refused to harden. Finally with a despairing sigh she slipped off her apron and turned down the gas so low that only a thin blue circle of flame flickered under the kettle. "In that way it can't boil over and it can't get cold," she thought. Then she washed her hands and hurried down to the drawing room.

Until that moment she had forgotten that A.O. was there with her "suitor," but one hasty glance was all she had time to give him. The tall lady in black was rising from her chair, was trailing forward to meet her, was exclaiming in that low full voice which had so impressed the footman. "Ah! Joyce Ware's own little sister! You've probably never heard of me, dear, but I've heard of *you,* often. And I knew that Joyce would want me to take back some message direct from you, so I just came out to-night for a glimpse."

Not giving the bewildered Mary opportunity to speak a word, she drew her to a seat beside her and went on rapidly, talking about Joyce and the success she was making in New York, and the many friends she had among famous people. Mary grew more and more bewildered. She had not heard that at the studio receptions which Joyce and her associates in the flat gave fortnightly, that all these

world-known artists and singers and writers were guests. It was strange Joyce had never mentioned them. But Mrs. Redmond named them all so glibly and familiarly, that she could not doubt her.

Almost petrified at seeing Mary walk into the room, A.O. had relapsed into a silence which she could not break. Jimmy, too, sat tongue-tied, staring in fascination at the strange blonde lady whose fluent, softly modulated speech seemed to exert some kind of hypnotic influence over him. Even through Mary's absorbing interest in Mrs. Robertson Redmons's tales, came the consciousness that A.O. and her friend were sitting there, perfectly dumb, and she stole a curious glance in their direction, wondering why.

"And I have just learned," said Mrs. Redmond, her gold tooth gleaming through her smile, "overheard it, in fact, quite by accident, that a dear little friend of mine is in the school — General Walton's youngest daughter, Elise. I should be so glad to see her also this evening. I should have sent up a card for her, too, had I known. Would it be too much trouble for you to send word to her now?"

A.O. blushed furiously, knowing full well how and where the stranger had overheard that Elise was in the school. She tried frantically to recall just

what it was she had said about her, in her endeavour to amuse Jimmy. Something extravagant, she knew, or he would not have laughed so horribly loud.

As Mary rose to send the message to Elise the lady dropped her muff. They both stooped to pick it up. Mary was first to reach it, and as she gave it back two things met her astonished gaze. On the little finger of the bare hand held out for the muff shone the agate that none but MacIntyres had owned since the days of Malcolm the Second. And through the parted lips, where an instant before a gold-crowned tooth had gleamed, shone only perfect little white teeth, with not a glint of dentist's handiwork about them. The gold-leaf had slipped off.

Mary gasped, but before the others had a chance to see her amazed face, the lady had risen and linked her arm through hers, and was drawing her towards the door, saying. "Let me go with you. I am sure that Elise will not mind receiving such a very old friend as I am up in her room."

Although the lady in black clung to her, shaking hysterically with repressed laughter, behind her crape-bordered veil, it was not till they had passed the footman, climbed the stairs and paused at Elise's door that Mary was sure of the identity of her

guest. The disguise had been so complete that she could not believe the evidence of her own eyes, until the blond wig was torn off and the spectacles laid aside. Then Elise threw herself across her bed, laughing until she gasped for breath. Her mirth was so contagious that Mary joined in, laughing also until she was weak and breathless, and could only cling to the bedpost, wiping her eyes.

"And wasn't Jimmy a whole menagerie!" Elise exclaimed as soon as she could speak. "You should have been there to have heard him howl and tear his hair at something A.O. told him about me. And I sat there with a perfectly straight face through the whole of it, while she made up dreadful things about me. I'm going away off in the pasture to-morrow and practise that bray all by myself till I can do it to perfection. Then when A.O. begins to sing his praises again, I won't say a word. I'll just give her Jimmy's laugh. Won't she be astonished? She's bound to recognize it, for it's the only one of its kind in the world. I shall keep her guessing until after Christmas, where I heard it."

"Don't *you* tell her till then!" she exclaimed, sitting up on the side of the bed. "She would be so furious she wouldn't speak to me. But after the holidays, it won't be so fresh in her mind. Promise you won't tell her."

Still laughing, Mary promised, and Elise began to gather up the various articles of her disguise, saying, "It was worth a five-pound box of chocolates to hear her describe me as a reckless scapegrace in that sorority racket we had."

The mention of candy had the effect of an electric shock on Mary. "Mercy!" she cried. "I forgot all about that stuff I left upstairs."

Instantly sobered, she hurried away to its rescue. She had intended to go down only long enough to discover the caller's errand, and then excuse herself until the candy could be safely left. But more than a quarter of an hour had gone by. Somewhere about the premises, and for some reason unknown to her, a greater pressure of gas had been turned on, and the thin blue flame under the kettle had shot up to a full blazing ring. A smell of burnt sugar greeted her as she opened the door. There was no need to look into the kettle. She knew before she did so that the candy was burnt black, and Jack's fob no longer attainable.

Her first impulse was to run to Betty for comfort. It would be easy enough to borrow the money she needed from her, and pay her back after the holidays, but — a sober second thought stopped her. Probably the girls wouldn't want her candy then.

Each of the boxes had been ordered as a special Christmas offering for some relative with a well-known sweet tooth. And Mary had a horror of debt, that was part of her heritage from her grandfather Ware. It was his frequent remark that "who goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing," and it lay heavy on the conscience of every descendant of his who stepped aside even for a moment from the path of his teachings. She felt that it would be dishonest to send Jack a present that wasn't fully paid for, and yet the disappointment of not being able to send it was so deep, that she could not keep the tears back. They splashed down like rain into the kettle as she scraped away at the scorched places on the bottom.

It was a long time before she went back to her room. Ethelinda looked up curiously.

"Where's your candy?" she asked.

"Spoiled. It scorched and I had to throw it out." Her face was turned away, under pretence of searching for a book, but her voice was subdued and not altogether steady.

"Too bad," was the indifferent answer, and Ethelinda went on with her lesson, but presently a faint sniff made her glance up to see that Mary was not studying, only staring at her book with big

tears dropping quietly on the page. In all the weeks they had been together she had never seen Mary in this mood before, and it seemed as strange that she should be crying as that rain should drop from a cloudless sky.

The sight of Mary in trouble awakened a feeling that seldom came to the surface in Ethelinda. She felt moved to pick her up and comfort her and put her out of harm's way as she would have done to a helpless little kitten. But she did not know how to begin. Naturally undemonstrative, any expression of sympathy was hard for her to make. They had grown into very friendly relations this last month. Warwick Hall had widened Ethelinda's horizon, until she was able to take an interest in many things now outside of her own narrow self-centred circle.

As they started to undress she managed to ask, "Well, have you sent for that watch-fob yet?"

Mary shook her head, trying hard to swallow a sob, as she bent over an open bureau drawer. "I've decided not to order it."

Then Ethelinda, putting two and two together, guessed the reason. If Mary could have known how long she lay awake that night, devising some scheme to help her out of her difficulty, she would not have been so surprised next morning when a

hesitating voice spoke up from the opposite bed, just after the rising bell.

"Mary, will you promise not to get mad and throw things at me if I ask you something?" She went on hurriedly, for they both recalled a scene when such a thing had happened. She felt she had blundered by alluding to it.

"I wouldn't dare ask it at all if I didn't know that you had failed with your candy, and might want to raise your Christmas funds some other way. No, I guess I'd better not ask you, after all. It might make you furious."

Mary sat up in bed, not only curious to know what it is Ethelinda was afraid to ask, but wondering at her hesitancy. Heretofore she had stopped at nothing; the most cutting allusions to Mary's appearance, behaviour and friends. They had both been appallingly frank at times. Their growing friendship seemed to thrive on this outspokenness.

"Oh, go on!" begged Mary. "I'd rather you'd make me furious than to keep me so curious, and I'll give you my word of honour I won't get mad."

"Well, then," began Ethelinda, slowly, "you know I had such a cold last week when the hairdresser came, that I couldn't have my usual shampoo, and she always charges a dollar when she

makes an extra trip just for one head. She wouldn't come this week anyhow, no matter how much I paid her, because she is so busy, and I simply must have my hair washed before the night of the tableaux. So I thought — if you didn't mind doing a thing like that — for me — you might as well have the dollar."

There was a pause. A long one. Ethelinda knew that Mary was recalling her speech about a lady's maid, and felt that the silence, so long and oppressive, was ominous. If she had asked it as a favour, Mary would not have hesitated an instant. The other girls often played barber for each other, making a frolic out of the affair. But for *Ethelinda,* and for *money!* That made a menial task of it, and her pride rose up in arms at the thought.

"Now you *are* mad! I knew you'd be!" came in anxious tones from the other bed. "I wish I had kept my mouth shut."

"No, I'm not," asserted Mary, stoutly. "I'm making up my mind. I was just thinking that you wouldn't do it if you were in my place, and I wouldn't do it to keep myself from starving, if it were just for myself, but it's for *Jack.* I'd get down and black the shoes of my worst enemy for Jack, and under the circumstances, I'm very glad to accept

your offer, and I think it is very sweet of you to give me such a chance. You shall have the best shampoo in my power to give as soon as you are ready for it."

Later, she paused in her dressing, thinking maybe she had not been gracious enough in expressing her appreciation, and said emphatically, "Ethelinda, that was awfully good of you to think of a way to help me out of my difficulty. Last night I was so down in the dumps, and so disappointed over Jack's Christmas present, that I thought I never could smile again. But now I'm so sure it is coming out all right that I am as light-hearted as a bit of thistle-down."

Ethelinda made some trivial reply, but immediately began to hum in a happy undertone. She was feeling surprisingly light-hearted herself. The rôle of benefactor was an unusual one, and she enjoyed the sensation.

For all her appreciative speeches, Mary approached her task that afternoon with inward reluctance. Only a grim determination to do her best to earn that dollar was her motive at first, and she helped herself by imagining it was the Princess Winsome's sunny hair which she was lathering and rubbing so vigorously. Ethelinda closed her eyes,

enjoying the touch of the light fingers, and wishing the operation could be prolonged indefinitely. Somehow this intimate, personal contact seemed to create a friendliness for each other they had never known before. Presently Mary was chatting away almost as cordially as if it were Elise's dusky curls she had in her fingers, or A.O.'s brown braids.

Under promise of secrecy she told of Elise's masquerade the night before, and of A.O.'s wild curiosity about the lady in black. She had persecuted them all morning with questions, and they were almost worn out trying to evade them and to baffle her. Ethelinda appreciated being taken into her confidence, for she had been more lonely than her pride would allow her to admit. Her patronizing airs and ill-guarded speech about being exclusive in the choice of friends had offended most of the lower-class girls. Slowly she was learning that her old standards would not bear comparison with Madam Chartley's and the Lady Evelyn's and that she must accept theirs if she would have any friends at Warwick Hall. Her friendship with Mary took a long stride forward that afternoon.

The rest of the money came in various ways. Mary found appropriate quotations for a set of unique dinner cards, to fit the pen and ink illustra-

tions which one of the Seniors bought to give her sister, a prominent club-woman, whose turn it was to give the yearly club dinner. She did some indexing for the librarian and some copying for Miss Chilton, and by the end of the week not only was Jack's fob on its way to Arizona, with presents for the rest of the family, but there was enough left in her purse to pay her share towards the mock Christmas tree.

It gave her a thrill to think that out of the entire school she had been chosen as one of the committee of nine for the delightful task of tying up the parcels for that tree. It was such bliss to share all the secrets and anticipate the surprise and laughter each ridiculous gift would call forth. And when all the joking and rollicking was over there was the carol service on the last night of the term, so sweet and solemn and full of the real Christmas gladness, that it was something to remember always as the crowning beauty of that beautiful time.

Old Bishop Chartley came down as usual for the service, and the chapel, fragrant with pine and spicy cedar boughs and lighted only by tall white candles, was just as Lloyd had described it, when she told of the Bishop's talk about keeping the White Feast on the birthday of the King. When the great doors

swung wide for the white-robed choir to enter, Mary knew that it was only the Dardell twins leading in the processional with flute and cornet. But as they came slowly up the dim aisle under the arches of Christmas greens, their wide, flowing sleeves falling back from their arms, they made her think of two of Fra Angelico's trumpet-blowing angels, and she clasped her hands with a quick indrawing of breath. The high silvery flute notes and the mellow alto of the deep horn were like the voices of the Seraphim, leading all the others in their pean of "Glad tidings of great joy." Oh, it was good to be at a school like this she thought with a throb of deep thankfulness. And it was so good to know that all her plans had worked out happily, and her Christmas gifts for the girls were just what she wanted them to be. Her thoughts strayed away from the service a moment to recall the little bundles she had hidden in Elise's and A.O.'s suit-cases, and the package she had ready for Ethelinda, a prettily scalloped linen cover for her dressing-table with her initials, worked in handsome block letters in the centre.

No regrets clouded her face next morning, when she stood at the door, watching the last 'bus load of merry girls start home for the holidays. She was

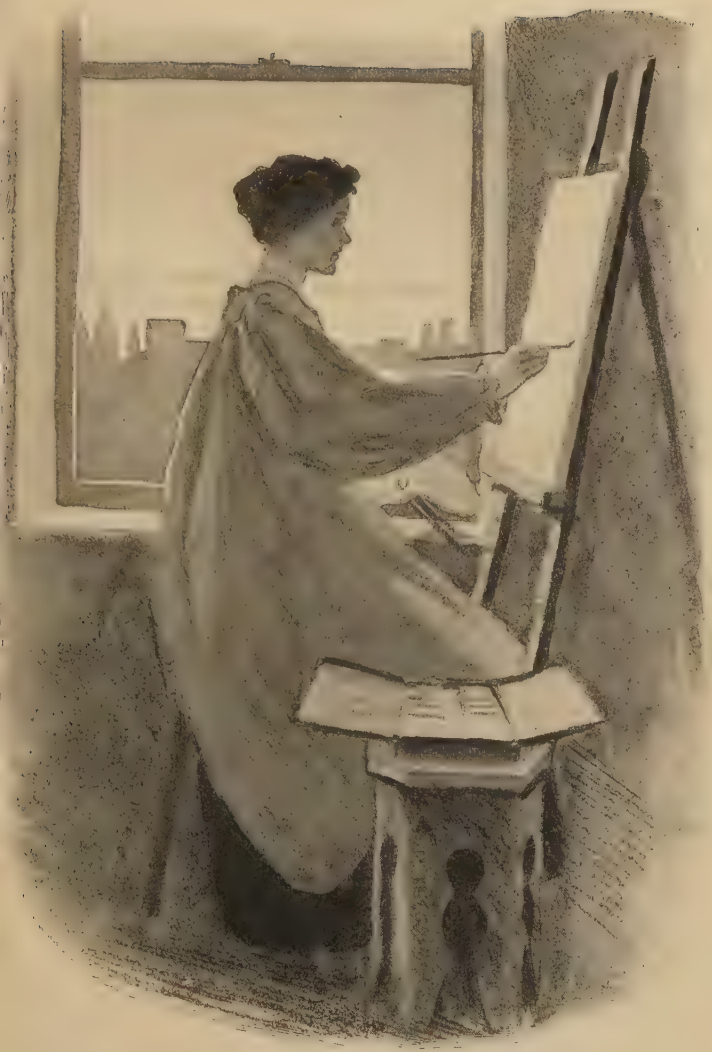
not going home herself. Arizona was too far away. But she had something more thrilling than that in prospect — a visit to Joyce in New York, she and Betty, and Christmas day with Eugenia, at the beautiful Tremont home out on the Hudson. She had been hearing about it for the last two years. And there was Eugenia's baby she was eager to see, the mischievous little year-old Patricia, "as beautiful as her father and as bad as her naughty Uncle Phil," Eugenia had written, in her letter of invitation.

And Phil himself would be there, — *maybe*. He was trying to get his work in shape so that he could be home at Christmas time. Mary did not realize how much her anticipations of this visit were tinged by the glow of that maybe. Her thoughts ran ahead to that day at Eugenia's oftener than to any other part of the grand outing. There was to be a whole week of sight-seeing in New York sandwiched in between the cozy hours at home with Joyce in her studio, and then on the roundabout way back to school a stop-over at Annapolis, for a few hours with Holland.

Filled with such an ineffable spirit of content that she would not have exchanged places with any one in the whole world, she watched the last 'bus load

drive away, waving their handkerchiefs all down the avenue, and singing:

"O Warwick Hall, dear Warwick Hall,
The joys of Yule now homeward call.
Yet still we'll keep the tryst with you,
Though for a time we say adieu.
Adieu! Adieu!"



"THE GIRLISH FIGURE ENVELOPED IN A LONG LOOSE WORKING APRON."

CHAPTER VII

IN JOYCE'S STUDIO

THE short winter day was almost at an end. High up in the top flat of a New York apartment house, Joyce Ware sat in her studio, making the most of those last few moments of daylight. In the downstairs flats the electric lights were already on. She moved her easel nearer the window, thankful that no sky-scraper loomed between it and the fading sunset, for she needed a full half hour to complete her work.

There were a number of good pictures on the walls, among them some really fine old Dutch interiors, but any artist would have turned from the best of them to study the picture silhouetted against the western window. The girlish figure enveloped in a long loose working apron was all in shadow, but the light, slanting across the graceful head bending towards the easel, touched the brown hair with glints of gold, and gave the profile of the earnest young face, the distinctive effect of a Rembrandt portrait.

Wholly unconscious of the fact, Joyce plied her brush with capable practised fingers, so absorbed in her task that she heard nothing of the clang and roar of the streets below, seething with holiday traffic. The elevator opposite her door buzzed up and down unheeded. She did not even notice when it stopped on her floor, and some one walked across the corridor with a heavy tread. But the whirr of her door bell brought her to herself with a start, and she looked up impatiently, half inclined to pay no attention to the interruption. Then thinking it might be some business message which she could not afford to delay, she hurried to the door, brush and palette still in hand.

"Why, Phil Tremont!" she exclaimed, so surprised at sight of the tall young man who filled the door-way that she stood for an instant in open-mouthed wonder. "Where did *you* drop from? I thought you were in the wilds of Oregon or some such borderland. Come in."

"I got in only a few hours ago," he answered, following her down the hall and into the studio. "I have only been in town long enough to make my report at the office. I'm on my way out to Stuart's to spend Christmas with him and Eugenia, but I couldn't resist the temptation of staying over a

train to run in and take a peep at you. It has been nearly six months, you know, since I've had such a chance."

Joyce went back to her easel, as he slipped off his overcoat. "Don't think that because I keep on working that I'm not delighted to see you, but my orders are like time and tide. They wait for no man. This must be finished and out of the house to-night, and I've not more than fifteen minutes of good daylight left. So just look around and make yourself at home and take my hospitable will for the deed till I get through. In the meantime you can be telling me all about yourself."

"There's precious little to tell, no adventures of any kind — just the plain routine of business. But *you've* had changes," he added, looking around the room with keen interest. "This isn't much like the bare barn of a place I saw you in last. You must have struck oil. Have you taken a partner?"

"Several of them," she replied, "although I don't know whether they should be called partners or boarders or adopted waifs. They are all three of these things in a way. It began with two people who sat at the same table with me those first miserable months when I was boarding. One was a little cheerful wren of a woman from a little West-

ern town, a Mrs. Boyd. That is, she is cheerful now. Then she was like a bird in a cage, pining to death for the freedom she had been accustomed to, and moping on her perch. She came to New York to bring her niece, Lucy, who is all she has to live for. Some art teacher back home told her that Lucy is a genius — has the makings of a great artist in her, and they believed it. She'll never get beyond fruit-pieces and maybe a dab at china-painting, but she's happy in the hope that she'll be a world-wonder some day. Neither of them have a practical bone in their body, whereas I have always been a sort of Robinson Crusoe at furnishing up desert islands.

" So I proposed to these two castaways that we go in together and make a home to suit ourselves. We were so dead tired of boarding. About that time we picked up Henry, and as Henry has a noble bank account we went into the project on a more lavish scale than we could have done otherwise."

" *Henry!* " ejaculated Phil, who was watching the silhouette against the window with evident pleasure.

" Yes, Miss Henrietta Robbins, a bachelor maid of some — well, I won't tell how many summers, but she's ' past the freakish bounds of youth,' and a real artist. She's studied abroad, and she's done things worth while. That group of fishermen on the Nor-

mandy coast is hers," nodding towards the opposite wall, " and that old woman peeling apples, and those three portraits. Oh, she's the real thing, and a constant inspiration to me. And she's brought so much towards the beautifying of our Crusoe castle: all these elegant Persian rugs, and those four " old masters," and the bronzes and the teakwood carvings — you can see for yourself. Lucy wasn't quite satisfied with the room at first. She missed the fish-net draperies and cozy corners and the usual clap-trap of amateur studios. But she's educated up to it now, and it's a daily joy to me. On the other hand my broiled steaks and feather-weight waffles and first-class coffee are a joy to poor Henry, who can't even boil an egg properly, and who hasn't the first instinct of home-making."

" You don't mean to say that you do the cooking for this happy family!"

Joyce laughed at his surprised tone. " That's what makes it a happy family. No domestic service problems. With a gas range, a fireless cooker and all the conveniences of our little kitchenette, it's mere play after my Wigwam experiences. We have a woman come several times a week to clean and do extras, so I don't get more exercise than I need to keep me in good condition."

"But doesn't all this devotion to the useful interfere with your pursuit of the beautiful? Where do you find time for your art?"

"Oh, my art is all useful," sighed Joyce. "I used to dream of great things to come, but I've come down to earth now — practical designing. Magazine covers and book plates and illustrating. I can do things like that and it is work I love, and work that pays. Of course I'd *rather* do Madonnas than posters, but since the pot must boil I am glad there are book-covers to be done. And *some* day — well, I may not always have to stay tied to the earth. My wings are growing, in the shape of a callow bank account. When it is full-fledged, then I shall take to my dreams again. Already Henry and I are talking of a flight abroad together, to study and paint. In two years more I can make it, if all goes well."

The striking of a clock made her glance up, exclaiming over the lateness of the hour. "Phil," she asked, "would you mind telephoning down to the station to find out if that Washington train is on time? That's a good boy. That little sister of mine will think the sky has fallen if I'm not at the station to meet her."

"You don't mean to tell me that *Mary* is on her

way here," exclaimed Phil, as he rose to do her bidding. "Then I certainly have something to live for. Her first impressions of New York will be worth hearing." He scanned the pages of the telephone directory for the number he wanted.

"Yes, she and Betty are to spend their vacation with me. We are going out to Eugenia's to-morrow afternoon to spend Christmas eve and part of Christmas day."

"Then that was the surprise that Eugenia wrote about," said Phil, taking out his watch. "She wouldn't tell what it was, but said that it would be worth my while to come. Yes, the train is on time."

He hung up the receiver. "I won't be able to wait for it, if I get out to Eugenia's for dinner, but I can see you safely to the station on my way. It is about time we were starting if you expect to reach it."

Joyce made a final dab at her picture, dropped the brush and hurried into the next room for her wraps. It seemed to Phil that he had scarcely turned around till she was back again, hatted and gloved. The artist in the long apron had given place to a stylish tailor-made girl in a brown street-suit. Phil looked down at her approvingly as they stepped out into the wintry air together.

The great show windows were ablaze with lights by this time, and the rush of the crowds almost took her off her feet. Phil at her elbow piloted her along to a corner where they were to take a car.

"I'm glad that I happened along to take you under my wing," he said. "You ought not to be out alone on the streets at night."

"It isn't six o'clock yet," she answered. "And this is the first time that I had no escort arranged for. Mrs. Boyd always comes with me. She's little and meek, but her white hair counts for a lot. She would have gone to the station with me, but she and Lucy are dining out. We girls will be all alone to-night. I wish they were not expecting you out at Eugenia's to dinner. I'd take you back with me. I have prepared quite a company spread, things that you especially like."

"There's a telephone out to the place," he suggested. "I could easily let them know if I missed my train, and I could easily miss it — if my invitation were pressing enough."

"Then *do* miss it," she insisted, smiling up at him so cordially that he laughed and said in a complacent tone, "We'll consider it done. I'll telephone Eugenia from the station, that I'll not be out till morning. Really," he added a moment later, "it

will be more like a sure-enough home-coming to come back to you and that little chatterbox of a Mary than to go out to my brother's. Eugenia is a dear, but I've never known her except as a bride or a dignified young matron, so of course we have no youthful experiences in common to hark back to together. That is the very back-bone of a family reunion in my opinion. Now that year in Arizona, when you all took me in as one of yourselves, is about all that I can remember of real home-life, and somehow, when I think of home, it is the Wigwam that I see, and the good cheer and the jolly times that I always found there."

Joyce looked up again, touched and pleased. "I'm so glad that you feel that way, for we always count you in, right after Jack and the little boys. Mamma always speaks of you as 'my other' boy, and as for Mary, she quotes you on all occasions, and thinks you are very near perfection. She is going to be so delighted when she sees you, that I'd not be a bit surprised if she should jump up and down and squeal, right in the station."

The mention of this old habit of Mary's brought up to each of them the mental picture of the child, as she had looked on various occasions when her unbounded pleasure was forced to find expression

in that way. In the year that Joyce had been away from her she had been in her thoughts oftener as that quaint little creature of eight, than the sixteen-year old school girl she had grown into.

Phil, too, accustomed to thinking of Mary as he had known her at the Wigwam, could hardly believe he saw aright, when the train pulled in and she flew down the steps to throw her arms around Joyce. It was the same, lovable, eager little face that looked up into his, the same impetuous unspoiled child, yet a second glance left him puzzled. There was some intangible change he could not label, and it interested him to try to analyze it.

She was taller, of course, almost as tall as Joyce, with skirts almost as long, but it was not that which impressed him with the sense of change. It was a certain girlish winsomeness, something elusive, which cannot be defined, but which lends a charm like nothing else in all the world to the sweet unfolding of early maidenhood.

If Phil had been asked to describe the girl that Mary would grow into, he never would have pictured this development. He expected her desert experiences to give her a strong forceful character. She would be like the pioneer women of early times, he imagined; rugged and energetic and full of re-

sources. But he had not expected this gentleness of manner, this unconscious dignity and a certain poise that reminded him of — he was puzzled to think of what it *did* remind him. Later, it came to him, as he continued to watch her. Not for naught had Mary set up a shrine to her idolized Princess Winsome and striven to grow like her in every way possible. Not in feature, of course, but often in manner there was a fleeting, shadowy undefinable something that recalled her.

In her younger days she would have appropriated Phil as her rightful audience, and would have swung along beside him, amusing him with her original and unsolicited opinions of everything they passed. But a strange shyness seized her when she looked up and saw how much older he was in reality than he had been in her recollections. She had no answer ready when he began his accustomed teasing. Instead she clung to Joyce when they left the street-car, leaving Betty to walk with Phil as they threaded their way through the crowded thoroughfares. It was so good to be with her again, and as they hurried along she squeezed the arm linked in hers to emphasize her delight.

For the time, Joyce found no change in her, for with child-like abandon she exclaimed over the

strange sights. "Oh, Joyce! Snow!" she cried, when a falling flake brushed her face. "After all these years of orange-blossoms and summer sun at Christmas, how good it seems to have real old Santa Claus weather! I can almost see the reindeer and smell the striped peppermint and pop-corn. And oh, *oh!* look at that shop-window. It is positively dazzling! And the racket — " she put her hands over her ears an instant. "I feel that I've never really heard a loud noise till now."

Joyce laughed indulgently, and stopped with her whenever she wanted to gaze in at some particularly attractive show window. When they reached the flat, Mary still kept near her, "tagging after her," as she would have expressed it in her earlier days, so much like the little sister of that time, that Joyce still failed to see how much she had changed during their separation.

"You see it's just like a doll-house," Joyce said as she led them through the tiny rooms on a tour of inspection. "All except the studio. We had a partition taken out and two rooms thrown together for that. Now the company will have to go in there and entertain themselves while I put the finishing touches to the dinner. The kitchenette will only hold one at a time."

Betty and Phil obediently went into the studio to renew their acquaintance of two years before, begun at Eugenia's wedding, and wandered around the room looking at the various specimen's of Joyce's handicraft pinned about on the walls. One of the first pauses was before a sketch of Lloyd, done from memory, a little wash drawing of her. Mary, standing in the doorway, heard Phil say, "Tell me about her, Miss Betty. She writes so seldom that I can only imagine her conquests."

For a moment Mary watched him, as he studied the sketch intently. Then she turned away to the kitchenette to help Joyce, thinking how lovely it must be to have a handsome man like that bend over your picture so adoringly, and speak of you in such a fashion.

It was a merry little dinner party, and afterwards it was almost like old times at the Wigwam, for Phil insisted on helping wipe the dishes, and was so boyish and jolly with his teasing reminiscences that she almost forgot her new awe of him. But afterward when they sat around the woodfire in the studio ("a piece of Henry's much enjoyed extravagance," Joyce explained, "and only lighted on gala occasions like this") they were suddenly all grown up and serious again. Joyce talked about her work, and the

friends she had made among editors and illustrators, and ambitious workaday people whose acquaintance was both a delight and an inspiration. It was Henrietta who brought them to the studio, along with the Persian rugs and the "old masters," and Joyce could never get done being thankful that she had found such a friend in the beginning of her career.

Phil told of his work too, and his travels, and in the friendly shadows cast by the flickering firelight talked intimately of his plans and ambitions, and what he hoped ultimately to achieve.

Betty confessed shyly some of her hopes and dreams, warranted now, by the success of several short flights in essay writing and verse, and then Phil said laughingly, "Do you remember what Mary's dearest wish used to be? How we roared the day she gravely informed us that it was her highest ambition to be 'the toast of two continents.' Is it still that, Mary?"

"No," she answered, laughing with the rest, but blushing furiously. "I had just been reading the biography of a great Baltimore belle who was called that, and it appealed to me as the most desirable thing on earth to be honoured with such a title. But that was away back in the dark ages. Of course I wouldn't wish such a silly thing now."

"But aren't you going to tell us what *is* your greatest ambition?" persisted Phil. "We have all confessed. It isn't fair for you to withhold your confidence when we've given ours."

Mary shook her head. "I've had my lesson," she declared. "You'll never have the chance to laugh twice, and this one is such a sky-scraper it would astonish you."

When she spoke, she was thinking of that moment on the stair, under the amber window, when through the music she heard the king's call, and was first awakened to the knowledge that a high destiny awaited her. What it was to be was still unrevealed to her, but of the voice and the vision she had no doubt. Whatever it was she was sure it would be higher and greater than anything any one she knew aspired to. Yet somehow, sitting there in the friendly shadows, with the firelight shining on the earnest manly face opposite, she did not care so much about a Joan of Arc career as she had. It would be glorious, of course, but it might be lonesome. People on pedestals were shut off from dear delightful intimacies like this.

And then those lines began running through her head that she had not been able to get rid of, since the morning she read them in the magazine:

" For if he come not by the road, and come not by the hill,
And come not by the far seaway — "

She wished that she was certain that she could add that last part of the line, *" Yet come he surely will!"* Just then, to have one strong true face bending towards hers in the firelight, with a devotion all for her, seemed worth a lifetime of public plaudits, and having one's name handed down to posterity on monoliths and statues.

" For if he come not by the road, and come not by the hill,
And come not by the far seaway — "

" Yes, it certainly would be lonesome," she decided. She would miss the best that earth holds for a home-loving, hero-worshipping woman.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTMAS DAY AT EUGENIA'S

"ATHOUGH this is only the twenty-fourth of December, my Christmas has already begun," wrote Mary in her diary next day; "for this morning when I looked out of the window everything was white with snow. It has been so long since I have seen such a sight, all the roofs and chimney tops a-glisten, that I could hardly keep away from the window long enough to dress.

"Phil stayed quite late last night. Just as he was leaving, Mrs. Boyd and Miss Lucy came home, and of course we had to stay up a little while longer to meet them. By the time Joyce had turned the davenport in the studio into a bed for me, it was past midnight, and I couldn't go to sleep for hours. There was so much to think about.

"The next thing I knew I smelled coffee, and heard Joyce whistling just as she used to at home when she was getting breakfast, and I didn't waste many minutes in going out to her in that cunning

kitchenette. It is all white tiling and shining nickel-plate, as easy to keep clean as a china dish, and just a delight to work in. I never thought so before, but now it seems to me that it is just as nice to know how to serve a delicious meal as easily as Joyce does as it is to put a picture on canvas. I can see now what a good thing it was for both of us that we had to serve such a long apprenticeship in work and housekeeping, even if it did seem hard at the time.

" ' It gives a girl a sort of Midas touch,' Phil said last night; ' makes her able to gild even a garret and to turn any old place into a home.' He was so charmed with everything about the flat that he said he wanted to move into one right away, and make biscuits himself on a glass-topped table, and do stunts with the fireless cooker like Joyce. He has had a surfeit of cafés and hotels and boarding-houses.

" While we were at breakfast the postman came, and there were letters and packages for everybody. Lloyd sent a present to each of us. Mine was a darling little lace fan all spangled, like a cobweb with dew-drops caught in its meshes. We opened everything then and there, as we had already had part of our presents. Jack's to me was this holiday trip, and Mamma's was the shirt-waist that I travelled in from Washington.

" Joyce got a check that she hadn't expected before next month, and another one that she hadn't expected at all. It was for some initial letter sketches and tail-pieces that had been travelling around to different magazines for months. Besides, there was an order for a frontispiece for a child's magazine. She was so happy she could hardly finish her breakfast, and said now she could give me the present she had planned to give me in the beginning. She had been disappointed about some other work she had counted on, and thought she would have to cut my present down to some gloves and a book, but now she could play Santa Claus in fine style, and carry out her original intention. Just as soon as things were in order, she would take me down town and let me choose it.

" It was so exciting, not knowing what it was going to be, and hurrying along with the crowds of shoppers; everybody so smiling and happy and good-natured, no matter how much they were bumped into. I felt Christmasey down to my finger-tips, although they were nearly frozen. Last night's snow was almost a blizzard, and left it stinging cold.

" At last, after buying a lot of little things to put on the tree at Eugenia's, and keeping me guessing for over an hour about my present, Joyce took us

into a furrier's, and bought me a beautiful set of furs; a lovely long boa and a muff like the one Lloyd had her picture taken in the first year she was at Warwick Hall. I've always wanted furs like them. They look so opulent and luxurious. And maybe I wasn't proud and happy when I saw myself in the mirror! They just *make* my costume, and they made a world of difference in my comfort when we went out into the icy air again. I certainly would have squealed if I hadn't remembered that we were on Broadway, when Joyce told me that I looked so stunning that she could not keep her eyes off me. I knew just how happy it made her to be able to give me such a present, for I remembered what pleasure I had in sending Jack the watch-fob that I had earned all myself.

" Then we went to Wanamaker's and by that time it was so late she said we'd better go up stairs and take lunch there. There wouldn't be time to go home and prepare it ourselves. There was music playing, and it was all so gay and lively that I kept getting more and more excited every moment. Finally, while we were waiting for our orders to be filled, Betty said, ' It is so festive, I believe I'll give Mary my present now, instead of waiting till we get to Eugenia's.' Then she took a jeweller's box from

her shopping bag, and, lo and behold, when I opened it, the little *bloodstone ring* that I'd been longing for all these weeks! I was so happy I nearly cried.

"After lunch we came back to the flat to get our suit-cases. Joyce is packing hers now. In just a few minutes she will be ready, and then we will turn the key in the door and be off for Eugenia's. Mrs. Boyd and Miss Lucy have gone to Brooklyn to spend Christmas, and Miss Henrietta is away on a month's vacation."

The suburban train was crowded when the girls reached it. Even the aisles were full of bundle-laden passengers, until the first few stations were past. Then Betty and Joyce found seats together, and a fat old lady good-naturedly drew herself up as far as possible, in order that Mary might squeeze past her to the vacant seat next the window.

"I can't set there myself, on account of the cold coming in the cracks so," she wheezed apologetically. "But young people don't feel draughts, and anyway, you can put your muff up between you and it if you do."

"Mary has a travelling companion after her own heart," laughed Joyce to Betty, as they watched the old lady's bonnet bobbing an energetic accompaniment to her remarks. "She's always picking up

acquaintances on the train. She can get more enjoyment out of a day's railroad journey than some people get in a trip around the world."

"It is the same way at school," answered Betty. "You have no idea how popular she is, just because she is interested in everybody in that sweet friendly way."

They went on to talk of other things, so absorbed in their own conversation that they thought no more about Mary's. So they did not see that presently she turned away from her garrulous companion, and, wrapped in her own thoughts, sat gazing at the flying landscape. It was not at the snowy fields she was smiling with that happy light in her eyes, nor at the gleaming river. She was only dimly conscious of them and had forgotten entirely that it was the famous Hudson whose shore-line they were following. For once she was finding her own thoughts more interesting than the conversation of an unexplored stranger, although the old lady had taken her generously into her confidence during the first quarter of an hour. Indeed, it was one of those very confidences which had sent Mary off into her revery.

"I tell Silas that no one ever does keep Christmas just right till they get to be grand-parents like us, and have the children bringing *their* children home

to hang up their stockings in the old chimney corner. 'Peared like, that first Christmas that Silas and me spent together in our own house couldn't be happier, but it didn't hold a candle to them that came afterwards, when there was little Si and Emmy and Joe to buy toys for. Silas says we get a triple extract out of the day now, because we not only have *our* enjoyment of it, but what we get watching our children enjoy watching *their* children's fun."

She reached forward and with some difficulty extracted a toy from the covered basket on the floor at her feet, a wooden monkey on a stick. " I'm just looking forward to seeing Pa's face when he drops that into Joe's baby's little sock."

Her own kindly old face was a study, as she slid the grotesque monkey up and down the rod, chuckling in pleased anticipation. And Mary, with her readiness to put herself into another's place, smiled with her, sharing sympathetically the anticipation of her return. Straightway in her imagination, she herself was a grandmother, going home to some adoring old Silas, who had shared her joys and troubles for over half a century.

Up to this moment she had been thinking that it could not be possible for any one to have a happier Christmas than she was having. A dozen times she

had smoothed the soft fur of her boa with a caressing hand, and slipped back her glove to delight her eyes with the sight of her bloodstone ring, while her thoughts ran on ahead to the house-party towards which they were speeding. But the old lady's words had opened up a vista that set her to day-dreaming.

If by the road or by the hill or by the far sea-way "he" should really come, some day, then of course the Christmases they would spend together would be happier than this. Jack had always said that she would have her "innings" when she was a grandmother. All her life Mary had been dreaming romances about other people, now in a vague sweet way those dreams began to centre around herself.

It was almost dark when they left the train. Phil was at the station to meet them with a sleigh and a team of spirited black horses.

"Oh, sleighbells!" sighed Joyce, ecstatically, as she climbed into the back seat beside Betty. "I haven't been behind any since I left Plainsville. I wish we had forty miles to go. Nothing makes me feel so larky as the sound of sleighbells."

Phil glanced back over his shoulder. "It is a bare mile and a half to the house, but I told Eugenia I'd bring you home the roundabout way to make the drive longer, if you all were not cold. What do you say?"

"The long way by all means!" cried Joyce and Betty in the same breath.

Phil laughed. "The ayes have it. Even Mary's eyes, although she doesn't say anything," he added, seeing the beaming smile that crossed her face at the prospect of a longer drive. "They are shining like two stars," he went on mischievously, amused to see the colour flame up into her cheeks, and noticing how becoming it was. Then his mettlesome horses claimed his attention for awhile.

Later, as he looked back from time to time, in conversation with the older girls, his glance rested on Mary, sitting beside him as contented and happy as a kitten in those becoming furs, and he thought with satisfaction that the little Vicar was growing up to be a very pretty girl after all. Her eyes were positively starry under her long, curling lashes.

That Eugenia regarded their coming as a great event, they felt from the moment the sleigh drew up to the house. From every window streamed a welcoming light, and the front door, flung open at their approach, showed that the wide reception hall had been transformed into a bower of Christmas greens. Eugenia, radiant in her most becoming dinner gown of holly red, came running down the steps to meet them.

Ever since she had been established as mistress of this beautiful country place, she had longed for them to visit her. Guests she had in plenty, for young Doctor Tremont and his wife were noted for their lavish hospitality, but the welcome accorded her new friends and neighbours was nothing to the one reserved for these old friends of her girlhood. She wanted them to see for themselves that she had made no mistake in her weaving, and that marriage had indeed brought her the "diamond leaf" that Abdallah found only in Paradise.

"Patricia had just dropped asleep," she told them as she led the way up stairs. Not that it was the proper time, but she was always doing unexpected things. That very day she had surprised them with four new words which they had not dreamed she could say. Eliot had orders to bring her in the moment that she awakened, so they could soon see the most remarkable child in the world. Yes, Eliot was still with her, good old Eliot. She intended to keep her always. Not as a maid, however. She had earned the position of guardian angel to Patricia by all her years of devoted service, and she played her part to perfection.

While the girls opened their suit-cases and changed their dresses to costumes more suitable for

evening, Eugenia stood in the door between the two rooms, turning first one way and then the other to answer the questions rapidly propounded. Mary, thankful that her white pongee had not wrinkled, divided her attention between the donning of that, and the information that Eugenia was imparting.

She had named the baby for Stuart's great-aunt Patricia, who for so many years had been like a mother to the boys and Elsie. She felt that she owed the dear, prim old lady that much as a sort of reparation for all she had suffered at the hands of the boys whom she had loved so dearly in spite of her inability to understand them. Father Tremont had been so touched and pleased when she proposed it. No, he could not be with them this Christmas. He had taken Elsie to the south of France. She was not very strong. Yes, Phil approved of her choice of names, but he said just as soon as she was old enough he intended to buy her a monkey and name it Dago, so that there would be one Patricia who was not afraid of such a pet.[1]

Mary, who had watched with keen interest the unwrapping of the dozens of beautiful wedding gifts at The Locusts, took a peculiar pleasure in

[1] See "The Story of Dago" for an account of Phil's and Stuart's childhood.

looking around for them now, and recognizing them among the handsome furnishings of the different rooms. Heretofore the Locusts had been her ideal of all that a home should be, but this far surpassed anything she had ever seen in luxurious fittings.

As the girls followed their hostess over the house, with admiring exclamations for each room, Mary thought with inward amusement of the cold shivers she had had, as she stood with the bridal party between the Rose-gate and the flower crowned altar, listening to the solemn vow: "I, Eugenia, — take thee, Stuart — for better, for worse — " There had been no worse. It was all better, infinitely better, and the shivers had been entirely unnecessary.

Stuart came in presently, from a long round of professional visits. The young doctor had nearly as large a practise as his father, and had been riding all afternoon. Mary caught a glimpse of his meeting with Eugenia, in the hall, and when he came in, cordial as a boy in his welcome, and by numberless little courtesies showing himself the most considerate of hosts and husbands, she thought again, "This is one time it was *certainly* all 'for better.'"

"Where is 'Pat's Pill'?" he asked, looking around for Phil. "That is Patricia's name for him, as near as she can say it. Wouldn't you know

" SHE WAS A FASCINATING LITTLE CREATURE, ALL SMILES AND DIMPLES."

that she was a doctor's daughter, by giving her doting uncle a pill for a name? "

Phil and Mr. Forbes came in together. To Betty, one of the pleasantest parts of her visit was this meeting with the "Cousin Carl," who had added such vistas of delight to her life by taking her to Europe the year she was threatened with blindness. His hair was grayer now than then, and the years had added a few lines to his kind face, but he was not nearly so grave. He smiled oftener, and she noticed with satisfaction his evident pride in Eugenia since she had blossomed into such a happy, enthusiastic housewife, and his devotion to little Patricia, when she was brought in for awhile just after dinner.

She was a fascinating little creature, all smiles and dimples and coquettish shrugs, and she held royal court the few moments she was allowed to monopolize the attention of the company. It was her second Christmas eve, and she had been brought down for the first public ceremony of hanging her stocking in the great chimney corner. Even after she was carried away it was plain to be seen how the interest of the house centred around her. There was a tender glow in Eugenia's eyes every time she looked at the tiny white stocking hanging from the

holly wreathed mantel. And it was also plain to be seen that the little stocking gave a deeper meaning to the words carved underneath, to every one gathered around the fire: "East or West, Home is best." When the trimming of the great tree in the library began, it was found that each member of the household had bought her enough toys to stock a show-window.

"There is really too much for one kid," said Phil gravely, surveying his own lavish contributions. "What can she do with them when it is all over?"

Eugenia glanced from the long row of dolls she was counting, to the assortment of stuffed animals and toys already weighting the tinsel-decked branches. "She shall keep them only a day. I have made up my mind that she shall not grow up to be the selfish child that I was before Betty came along with her Tusitala story and her Road of the Loving Heart. She is to begin to build one now, even before she is old enough to understand. This is her first Christmas tree. To-morrow she shall choose one gift from each person's assortment of offerings. To-morrow night the tree and all the rest of the presents are to be turned over to the little orphans of St. Boniface Refuge."

"Daddy's name for her is 'Blessing,'" explained

Stuart. "So you see she is in a fair way to be trained up to fit it."

Since the tree was for children only, no gifts for the older people appeared among its branches, but in the night some silent-footed Kriss Kringle made his stealthy rounds, and left a gay little red and white stocking by every bedside. Mary discovered hers early in the morning, after the maid had been in to turn on the heat in the radiator, and close the windows. She wondered how it could have been placed there without her knowledge, for the slightest motion set the tiny bells on heel and toe a-jingling. She touched it several times just to start the silvery tinkle, then sitting up in bed emptied its treasures out on the counterpane. It was filled with bonbons and many inexpensive trifles, but down in the toe was a little gold thimble, from Patricia.

It was in the chair under the stocking that she found the gloves from Eugenia, the book from "Cousin Carl" and a long box that she opened with breathless interest because Phil's card lay atop. On it was scribbled, "The 'Best Man's' best wishes for a Merry Christmas to Mary."

Tearing off the ribbons and the tissue paper wrappings she lifted the lid, and then drew a long rapturous breath, exclaiming, "Roses! American Beauty

roses! The first flowers a man ever sent me — and from the *Best* Man!"

She laid her face down among the cool velvety petals and closed her eyes, drinking in the fragrance. Then she lifted each perfect bud and half blown flower to examine it separately, revelling in the sweetness and colour. Then the uncomfortable thought occurred to her that she was happier over this gift than she had been over the furs or the long-wished-for ring, and she began to make excuses to herself.

"Maybe if I'd always had them sent to me as Lloyd and Betty and the other girls have, it wouldn't seem such a big thing. But this is the first time. Of course it doesn't mean anything as it would if he had sent them to Lloyd. He is in love with *her*. Still — I'm glad he chose roses."

She touched the last one to her lips. It was so cool and sweet that she held it there a moment before she slipped out of bed and ran across the room to thrust the long stems into the water pitcher. She would ask the maid for a more fitting receptacle after awhile, but in the meantime she would keep them fresh as possible.

When she went down to breakfast she wore one thrust in her belt, and some of its colour seemed to

have found its way into her cheeks when she thanked Phil for his gift. The same rose was pinned on her coat, when later in the morning they went to a Christmas service at St. Boniface, the little stone church in the village, a mile away. Eugenia had suggested their going. She said it would be such a picture with the snow on its ivy-covered belfry, and the icicles hanging from the eaves. Some noted singer was to be in the choir, and would sing several solos. The walking would be fine through the dry crunching snow, and as they had right of way through all of the neighbouring estates between them and the village, it would be like going through an English park.

Stuart had an urgent round of professional visits to make and could not join them, and at the last moment some message came from the Orphanage in reference to the tree, which kept Eugenia at home to make some alteration in her plans. So when the time came to start only the four guests set out across the snowy lawn, down the woodland path leading to the village. They went Indian file at first in order that Phil might make a trail through the snow, until they reached the beaten path.

It was colder than they had expected to find it, and presently Mary dropped back to the rear, so that

she might hold her muff up, unobserved, to shield the rose she wore. She could not bear to have its lovely petals take on a dark purplish tinge at the edges where the frost curled them. In the church the steam-heated atmosphere brought out its fragrance till it was almost overpoweringly sweet, but when she glanced down she saw that it was no longer crisp and glowing. It had wilted in the sudden change, and hung limp and dying on its stem.

"I'll put it away in an envelope when I get back to the house," thought Mary. "When they all fade I'll save the leaves and make a potpourri of them like we made of Eugenia's wedding roses, and put them away in my little Japanese rose-jar, to keep always."

Then the music began, and she entered heartily into the beautiful Christmas service. The offering was to be divided among the various charities of the parish, it had been announced, and Mary, remembering the bright new quarter in her purse, was glad that she had earned that bit of silver herself. It made it so much more of a personal offering than if she had saved it from her allowance. She slipped her purse out of her jacket pocket as the prelude of the offertory filled the aisles and rose to the arches of the vaulted roof.

The man who carried the plate was slowly making his way towards the pew in which she sat, and with her gaze fixed on him, she began fumbling with the clasp of her purse, under cover of her muff. She had never seen such a rubicund portly gentleman, with two double chins and expansive bald spot on his crown. She held the coin between her fingers awaiting his slow approach. Just as he reached the end of their pew where Phil was sitting, she sneezed. Not a loud sneeze, but one of those inward convulsions that makes the whole body twitch spasmodically.

It sent a handful of petals from the wilted rose showering down into her lap. The coin dropped back into her purse as she made an instinctive grab to save them from going to the floor. Then blushing and embarrassed as the plate paused in front of her, she fumbled desperately in her purse to regain the dropped quarter. The instant the coin left her fingers she saw the mistake she had made, and reached out her hand as if to snatch it back. But it was too late, even if she had had the courage to reclaim it. She had dropped her English shilling into the plate instead of the quarter! Her precious talisman from the bride's cake, that she had carried as a pocket piece ever since Eugenia's wedding.

Betty, who sat next to her, was the only one who saw her confusion, and her sudden movement towards the plate after it passed. She glanced at her curiously, wondering at her agitation, but the next moment forgot it in listening to the wonderful voice that took up the solo.

But the solo, as far as Mary was concerned, might have been a siren whistle or a steam calliope. She was watching the man of the bald head and the double chins, who had walked off with her shilling. Down the central aisle went the pompous gentleman at last in company with two others, and the three plates were received by the rector and blessed and deposited on the altar, all in the most deliberate fashion, while Mary twisted her fingers and thought of desperate but impossible plans to rescue her shilling.

If she had been alone she would have hurried to the front at the close of the service, and watched to see who became the custodian of the alms. Then she could have pounced upon him and begged to be allowed to rectify her mistake. But Phil and the girls would think she had lost her mind if they should see her do such a thing, unless she explained to them. Somehow she shrank from letting anybody know how highly she valued that shilling. All

at once she had grown self-conscious. She had not known herself, just how much she cared for it until it was gone beyond recall. Aside from the sentiment for which she cherished it she had a superstitious feeling that her fate was bound up with it in such a way that the gods would cease to be propitious if she lost the talisman that influenced them.

No feasible plan occurred to her, however. The choir passed out in slow recessional. The congregation as slowly followed. Mary loitered as long as possible, even going back for her handkerchief, which she had purposely dropped in the pew to give her an excuse to return. But her anxious glances revealed nothing. The vestry door was closed, and nobody was inside the chancel rail.

As they passed down the steps Phil turned to glance at a small bulletin board outside the door, on which the hours of the service were printed in gilt letters. "Dudley Eames, Rector," he read in a low tone. "Strange I never can remember that man's name, when Stuart is always quoting him. They are both great golf players, and were eternally making engagements with each other over the phone, when I was here last summer. I heard it often enough to remember it, I'm sure."

He did not see the expression of relief which his

remark brought to Mary's face. It held a suggestion which she resolved to act upon as soon as she could find opportunity. She would telephone to the rector about it.

CHAPTER IX

THE BRIDE-CAKE SHILLING COMES TO LIGHT

All the way home she kept nervously rehearsing to herself the explanation which she intended to make, so absorbed in her thoughts, that she started guiltily when the girls laughed, and she found that Phil had asked her a question three times without attracting her attention. When they reached the house it was some time before she could slip upstairs unobserved. No amateur burglar, afraid of discovery, ever made a more stealthy approach towards his booty than she made towards the telephone. At any moment some one might come running up to the nursery. Three times she started out of her door, and each time the upstairs maid came through the hall and she drew back again.

When she finally screwed up her courage to sit down at the desk and find the rector's number, her heart was beating so fast that her voice trembled, as if she were on the verge of tears. Luckily the Reverend Eames had just returned to his study and

answered immediately. In her embarrassment she plunged as usual into the middle of her carefully prepared speech, explaining so tremulously and incoherently that for a moment her puzzled listener was doubtful of his questioner's sanity. Finally, when made to understand, he was very kind and very sympathetic, but his answer merely sent her on another quest. She would have to apply to the treasurer, he told her, Mr. Charles Oatley, who always took charge of all collections of the church, depositing them in the bank in the city, in which he was a director. That was all the information he could give her about it. Yes, Mr. Oatley lived in the country, near the village, at Oatley Crest. As this was a holiday, probably he would not take the money to the bank until the following morning.

Hastily thanking him, Mary listened a moment for coming footsteps, then called up Oatley Crest. To her disappointment a maid answered her. The family had all gone to take dinner with the James Oatleys, and would not be home until late at night. No, she did not know where the place was — some twenty miles away she thought. They had gone in a touring-car.

Baffled in her pursuit, Mary turned away, perplexed and anxious. She had forgotten to ask the

name of the bank. But the glimpse she caught of her worried face in a mirror in the hall made her pause to smooth the pucker out of it.

"It is foolish of me to let it spoil my Christmas day like this," she reasoned with herself. "If I can't keep inflexible any better than this I don't deserve to have fortune change in my favour."

So armed with the good vicar's philosophy, she went down to the group in the library. Almost immediately she had her reward.

"Well, what did *you* think of the offertory, Miss Mary?" asked Stuart, who had just come in, and was listening to the account that the girls were giving Eugenia of the morning's music. "Your sister thinks the soloist had the voice of an angel."

"I'll have to confess that I didn't pay as much attention to that as I did to the first solos," said Mary honestly. "I was so busy staring at the fat man who took up the collection in our aisle. He had at least four chins and was so bald and shiny he fascinated me. His poor head looked so bare and chilly I really think that must have been what made me sneeze — just pure sympathy."

"Oh, you mean Oatley," laughed Stuart. "He considers himself the biggest pillar in St. Boniface, if not its chief corner-stone. Awfully pompous and

important, isn't he? But they couldn't get along without him very well. He is a joke at the bank, where he is a sort of fifth wheel. They made a place for him there, because he married the president's daughter, and it was necessary for him to draw a salary."

One question more and Mary breathed easier. She had learned the name of the bank, and early in the morning she intended to start out to find it. With that matter settled it was easy for her to throw herself into the full enjoyment of all that followed. The Christmas dinner was served in the middle of the day instead of at night, and the afternoon flew by so fast that Eugenia protested against their going when the time came, saying that she had had no visit at all. Joyce explained that she had promised Mrs. Boyd to help with an entertainment that night for a free kindergarten over on the East Side, and that she must get to work again early in the morning to fill an order for some menu cards she had promised to have ready for the twenty-seventh.

Betty, also, had promised to go back. Mrs. Boyd was sure she would find material and local colour for several stories, and she felt that it was an opportunity that she could not afford to miss.

"Then Mary must stay with me," declared Eu-

genia, and Mary found it hard to refuse her hospitable insistence. Had it not been for the lost shilling she would have stayed gladly, and once, she was almost on the verge of confessing the real reason to Eugenia.

"I don't see why I should mind her knowing how much I think of it," she mused. "But I don't want anybody to know. They'd remember about its being a 'Philip and Mary shilling,' and they'd smile at each other behind my back as if they thought I attached some importance to it on that account."

To the delight of each of the girls, the invitation which they felt obliged to decline was changed to one for the week-end, so when they waved good-bye from the sleigh on their way to the station, it was with the prospect of a speedy return.

"'And they had feasting and merry-making for seventy days and seventy nights," quoted Mary, as the train drew into the city. "I used to wonder how they stood it for such a long stretch, but I know now. We have been celebrating ever since the mock Christmas tree at Warwick Hall — ages ago it seems — but there has been such constant change and variety that my interest is just as keen as when I started."

Mrs. Boyd and Lucy were at the flat waiting

for them when they arrived, and after a light supper, eaten picnic fashion around the chafing-dish, they started off for the novel experience of a Christmas night among the children of the slums. Betty did find the material which Mrs. Boyd had promised, and came home so eager to begin writing the tale, that she was impatient for morning to arrive. Joyce found suggestions for two pictures for a child's story which she had to illustrate the following week, and Mary came home a bundle of tingling sympathies and burning desires to sacrifice her life to some charitable work for neglected children.

She was also a-tingle with another thought. At the corner where they changed cars on the way to the Mission, she had made a discovery. The bank where St. Boniface deposited its money loomed up ahead of them, massive and grim. The name showed so plainly on the brilliantly illuminated corner, that it almost seemed to leap towards them. It would be an easy matter to find by herself. Now she need not ask anybody, but could slip away from the girls early in the morning, and be on the steps first thing when the doors opened.

Fortunately for her plans, Joyce announced that they would have an early breakfast, in order that she might begin work as soon as possible. Mrs.

Boyd and Lucy had not returned with them the night before, but had gone back to Brooklyn to finish their visit with their friends immediately after the exercises at the Mission. So only a small pile of dishes awaited washing when their simple breakfast was over. Mary insisted on attending to them by herself so that Betty could begin her story at once.

"Strike while the iron is hot!" she commanded dramatically. "Open while opportunity knocks at the door, lest she never knock again! I'll gladly be cook-and-bottle-washer in the kitchen while genius burns for artist and author in the studio! Scat! Both of you!"

So they left her, glad to be released from household tasks when others more congenial were calling. They heard her singing happily in the kitchenette, as she turned the faucet at the sink, and then forgot all about her, in the absorbing interest of the work confronting them. With so many conveniences at hand the washing of the dainty china was a pleasure to Mary, after her long vacation from such work. Quickly and deftly, with the ease of much practise, she polished the glasses to crystal clearness, laid the silver in shining rows in its allotted place, and put everything in spotless order.

Joyce heard her go into the bath-room to wash her hands, and thought complacently of Mary's wonderful store of resources for her own entertainment, wondering what she would do next. She had been asking questions about the roof garden, and how to open the scuttle. Probably she would be investigating that before long, getting a bird's-eye view of the city from the chimney tops.

"I believe she could find some occupation on the top of a church steeple," thought Joyce, recalling some of the things with which she had seen Mary amuse herself. There was the time in Plainsville when a burned foot kept her captive in the house, and she couldn't go to the neighbours. Always an indefatigable visitor, she amused herself with a pile of magazines, visiting in imagination each person and place pictured in the illustrations, and on the advertising pages. She played with the breakfast-food children, talked to the smiling tooth-powder ladies, and invented histories for the people who were so particular about their brands of soap and hosiery.

There was always something her busy fingers could turn to when tired of household tasks; beadwork and basket-weaving, embroidery, knitting, even strange feats of upholstering, and any repair

work that called for a vigorous use of hammer and saw and paint-brush. A girl who could sit by the hour watching ants and spiders and bees, who could quote poems by the yard, who loved to write letters and could lose herself to the world any time in a new book, was not a difficult guest to entertain. She could easily find amusement for herself even in the top flat of a New York apartment house. So Joyce went on with her painting with a care-free mind.

Meanwhile Mary was slipping into her travelling suit, hurrying on hat and gloves and furs, and with her heart beating loud at her own daring, boldly stepping out into the strange streets by herself. It was easy to find the corner where they had taken the car the night before. Only one block to the right and then one down towards a certain building whose mammoth sign served her as a landmark. But the night before she had not noticed that the track turned and twisted many times before it reached the corner where they changed for the East Side car, and she had not noticed how long it took to travel the distance. Rigid with anxiety lest she should pass the place she kept a sharp look-out, till she began to fear that she must have already done so, and finally mustered up courage to tell the con-

ductor the name of the bank at which she wished to stop.

"Quarter of an hour away, Miss," he answered shortly. So she relaxed her tension a trifle, but not her vigilance. There were a thousand things to look at, but she dared not become too interested, for fear the conductor should forget her destination, and she should pass it.

At last she spied the grim forbidding building for which she was watching, and almost the next instant was going up the steps, just three minutes before the clock inside pointed to the hour of opening. She could not see the time, however, as the heavy iron doors were closed, and the moments before they were swung open seemed endless. It seemed to her that people stared at her curiously, and her face grew redder than even the cold wind warranted. Then she heard the porter inside shoot the bolts back and turn the key, and as the door swung open she darted past him so suddenly that he fell back with a startled exclamation.

In her confusion all she saw was the teller's window, with a shrewd-eyed man behind its bars, looking at her so keenly that she was covered with confusion, and forgot the name of the man she wanted to see.

" ALL SHE SAW WAS THE TELLER'S WINDOW, WITH A SHREWD-EYED MAN BEHIND ITS BARS."

"I — I — think it is Wheatley," she stammered. "Any way he is awfully fat, and has two double chins, and married the president's daughter, and he takes up the collection at St. Boniface."

The man's mouth twitched under his bristling moustache, but he only said politely, "You probably mean Mr. Oatley. He's just come in." Then to Mary's horror, the man she had described rose from a desk somewhere behind the teller, and came forward pompously. It seemed to Mary that she stood there a week, explaining and explaining as one runs in a nightmare without making any progress, about dropping the wrong coin in the St. Boniface collection; an old family heirloom, something she would not have parted with for a fortune; then about telephoning to the rectory and to Oatley Crest. The perspiration was standing out on her forehead when she finished.

But in a moment the ordeal was over. A clerk was at that instant in the act of counting the money which Mr. Oatley had brought in to deposit. The shilling rolled out from among the quarters, and as she hurriedly repeated the date and inscription to prove her story, the coin was passed back to her with a polite bow.

She looked into her purse for the quarter which

she had started to put into the collection, then remembered that she had loaned it to Joyce for carfare the night before. There was a dollar in the middle compartment, and eager to get away, she plumped it down on the marble slab, saying hastily, "That's for the plate — what I should have put in instead of the shilling, and I can never begin to tell you how grateful I am to get this back."

In too great haste to see the amused glances that followed her, she hurried out to the corner to wait for a home-going car. While she stood there she opened her purse again for one more look at the rescued shilling. Then she gave a gasp. When she left the house the purse had held a nickel and a dollar. She had spent the nickel for car fare and left the dollar at the bank. Nothing was in it now but the shilling, and that was not a coin of the realm, even had she been willing to spend it. She would have to walk home.

"Now I *am* in for an adventure," she groaned, looking helplessly around at the hundreds of strange faces sweeping past her. "It's like 'water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink.' People, people everywhere, and not a soul that I dare speak to."

Knowing that she could never find her way home

should she undertake to walk all those miles, and that she would attract unpleasant attention if she stood there much longer, she started to stroll on, trying to decide what to do next. One block, two blocks and nearly three were passed, and she had reached no decision, when she came upon a motherly-looking woman and two half-grown girls, who had stopped in front of a window to look at a display of hats, marked down to half price. Mary stopped too. Not that she was interested in hats, but because she felt a sense of protection in their company.

"No, mamma," one of the girls was saying, "I'm *sure* we'll find something at Wanamaker's that will suit us better, and it's only a few blocks farther. Let's go there."

Wanamaker's had a familiar sound to Mary. The place where she had lunched only two days before would seem like home after these bewildering stranger-filled streets. So when the bargain-hunting trio started in that direction, she followed in their wake. They paused often to look in at the windows, and each time Mary paused too, as far from them as possible, since she did not want to call attention to the fact that she was following them.

The last of these stops was before a window

which looked so familiar that Mary glanced up to see the name of the firm. Then she felt that she had indeed reached a well-known haven, for the name was the same that was woven in gold thread in the tiny silk tag inside her furs. It was the place where Joyce had brought her to select her Christmas present, and there inside the window was the pleasant saleswoman who had sold them to her. She had been so nice and friendly and seemed to take such an interest in pleasing them that Joyce had spoken of it afterward.

Then the woman recognized her — looked from the furs to the eager little face above them and smiled. It seemed incredible to Mary that she should have been remembered out of all the hundreds of customers who must pass through the shop every day, but she did not know that the sight of her delight over her gift had been the one bright spot in the saleswoman's tiresome day.

Instantly her mind was made up, and darting into the shop in her impetuous way, she told her predicament to the amused woman, and asked permission to telephone to her sister.

Joyce, painting away with rapid strokes, in a hurry to finish the stent she had set for herself, looked up a trifle impatiently at the ringing of the

telephone bell. Her first impulse was to call Mary to answer it, but reflecting that probably the call would require her personal attention sooner or later, laid down her brush and went to answer it herself. She could hardly credit the evidence of her own ears when a meek little voice called imploringly, "Oh, Joyce, could you come and get me? I'm at the furrier's where you bought my Christmas present, and I haven't a cent in my pocket and don't know the way home."

"What under the canopy!" gasped Joyce, startled out of her self-possession. All morning she had been so sure that Mary was in the next room that it was positively uncanny to hear her voice coming from so far away.

"I've never known anything so spooky," she called. "I can't be sure its you."

"Well, I wish it wasn't," came the almost tearful reply. "I'm awfully sorry to interfere with your work, and you needn't stop till you get through. They'll let me wait here until noon. I've got a comfortable seat where I can peep out at the people on the street, and I don't feel lost now that you know where I am." Then with a little giggle, "I'm like the Irishman's tea-kettle that he dropped overboard. It wasn't lost because he knew where it was — in the bottom of the sea."

"Well, you're Mary, all right," laughed Joyce. "That speech certainly proves it. Don't worry, I'll get you home as soon as possible."

"Telephones are wonderful things," confided Mary to the saleswoman. "They are as good as genii in a bottle for getting you out of trouble. I should think the man who invented them would feel so much like a wizard, that he'd be sort of afraid of himself."

The woman answered pleasantly, and would gladly have continued the conversation, but was called away just then to a customer. Hidden from view of the street by a large dummy lady in a seal-skin coat and fur-trimmed skirt, Mary peeped out from behind it at the panorama rolling past the window. At first she was intensely interested in the endless stream of strange faces, but when an hour had slipped by and still they came, always strange, always different, a sense of littleness and loneliness seized her, that amounted almost to panic. She longed to get away from this great myriad-footed monster of a city, back to something small and familiar and quiet; to neighbourly greetings and friendly faces. The loneliness caused by the strange crowds depressed her. It was like a dull ache.

The moments dragged on. She had no way to

judge how long she waited, but the hour seemed at least two. Then suddenly, through the mass of people came a well-known figure with a firm, athletic tread. A man, who even in this crowd of well-dressed cosmopolitans attracted a second look.

"Oh, it's Phil!" she exclaimed aloud, her face brightening as if the sun had suddenly burst out on a cloudy day. She wondered if she dared do such a thing as to tap on the window to attract his attention. She would not have hesitated in Plainsville or Phœnix, but here everything was so different. Somebody else might look and Phil never turn his head.

While she waited, half-rising from her chair, he stopped, looked up at the sign, and then came directly towards the door. Wondering at the strange coincidence that should bring him into the one shop in all New York in which she happened to be sitting, she started up, thinking to surprise him. Then the surprise was hers, for she saw that he was in search of *her*. With a word to the obsequious salesman who met him, he came directly towards her hiding-place behind the dummy in sealskin. His face lighted with a merry smile that was good to see as he crossed over to her with outstretched hand, saying laughingly:

"The lost is found! Well, young lady, this is a pretty performance! What do you mean by shocking your fond relatives and friends almost into catalepsy? I happened to drop in at the studio just as Joyce got your message, and she and Betty were at their wits' end to account for your disappearance."

"Oh, I'm so *glad* to see you," answered Mary. "You can't imagine! I'm even as glad as I was that time you happened along when the Indian chased me." She ignored his question as entirely as if he had not asked it.

He asked it again when they were presently seated on a homeward bound car. "What I want to know is, what made you wander from your own fireside?"

Mary felt her cheeks burn. She was prepared to make a full confession to the girls, but not for worlds would she make it to him. Quickly turning her back on him as if to look at something that had attracted her attention in the street, she groped frantically around in her mind for an answer. He leaned forward, peering around till he could see her face, and repeated the question.

"Oh," she answered indifferently, bending slightly to examine the toe of her shoe with a little

frown, as if it interested her more than the question. "I just went out into the wide world to seek my fortune. You know I never had a chance before."

"And did you find it?"

She laughed. "Well, some people might not think so, but I'm satisfied."

"Did you have any adventures?" he persisted.

"Yes, heaps and heaps, but I'm saving them to go in my memoirs, so you needn't ask what they were."

"Lost on Broadway, or Arizona Mary's Mystery!" exclaimed Phil. "I shall never rest easy until I unearth it."

"Then you'll have a long spell of uneasiness," was the grim reply. "Horses couldn't drag it from me."

He had begun his questioning merely in a spirit of banter, but as she stubbornly persisted in her refusals, he began to think that she really had had some ridiculous adventure, and was determined to find out what it was. So he set traps for her, and cross-questioned her, secretly amused at the quick-witted way in which she continually baffled him.

"I see that you are sadly changed," he said finally, with a shake of the head. "The little Mary

I used to know would have given the whole thing away by this time — would have blurted out the truth before she knew what she was doing. She was too honest and straight-forward to evade a question. But you've grown as worldly-wise as an old trout — won't bite at any kind of bait. Never mind, though, I'll get you yet."

Thus put on her guard, Mary refused to tell even the girls what had possessed her to take secret leave that morning, but as she passed Joyce in the hall she whispered imploringly, "*Please* don't ask me to tell now. It isn't much, but I don't want to tell while he's in the house. He has been teasing me so."

"I'd stay to lunch if anybody would ask me three times," announced Phil, presently. "I have to have my welcome assured."

"I'll ask you if Mary is willing," said Joyce, who had gone back to her work. "She has promised to be chef to-day."

Mary regarded him doubtfully, as if weighing the matter, then said, "I'm willing if he'll promise not to mention what happened this morning another single time. And he can order any two dishes in the cook-book that can be prepared in an hour, and I'll make them; that is, of course, if the materials are in the house."

"Then I choose doughnuts," was the ready answer. "Doughnuts with holes in them and sugar sprinkled over the top, and light as a feather; the kind you used to keep in a yellow bowl with a white stripe around it, on the middle shelf in the Wigwam pantry. Gee! But they were good! I've never come across any like them since except in my dreams. And for the second choice — let me see!" He pursed up his lips reflectively. "I believe I'd like that to be a surprise, so Mistress-Mary-quite-contrary, you may choose that yourself."

"All right," she assented. "But if it is to be a surprise I must have a clear coast till everything is ready."

Arrayed in a long apron of Joyce's, Mary stood a moment considering the resources of refrigerator and pantry. There were oysters on the ice. An oyster stew would make a fine beginning this cold day. There was a chicken simmering in the fireless cooker. Joyce had put it on while they were getting breakfast, intending to make some sort of boneless concoction of it for dinner. But it would be tender enough by the time she was ready for it, to make into a chicken-pie. In the days when Phil had been a daily guest at the Wigwam, chicken-pie was his favourite dish. That should be the surprise for him.

It was queer how all his little preferences and prejudices came back to her as she set about getting lunch. He preferred his lemon cut in triangles instead of slices, and he liked the cauliflower in mixed pickles, but not the tiny white onions, and he wanted his fried eggs hard and his boiled eggs soft. But then, after all, it wasn't so queer that she should remember these things, she thought, for the likes and dislikes of a frequent guest would naturally make an impression on an observant child who took part in all the household work. It was just the same with other people. She'd never forget if she lived to be a hundred how Holland put salt in everything, and Norman wouldn't touch apple-sauce if it were hot, but would empty the dish if it were cold.

"I can't paint like Joyce, and I can't write like Betty," she thought as she sifted flour vigorously, "but thank heaven, I can cook, and give pleasure that way, and I like to do it."

An hour would have been far too short a time for inexperienced hands to do what hers accomplished, and even Joyce, who knew how quickly she could bring things to pass, was surprised when she saw the table to which they were summoned. The oyster stew was the first success, and good enough to be

the surprise they all agreed. Then the chicken-pie was brought in, and Phil, cutting into the light, delicately browned crust, declared it a picture in the first place, and a piece of perfection in the second place, tasting the rich, creamy gravy, and thirdly "a joy for ever," to remember that once in life he had partaken of a dish fit for the gods.

"Honestly, Mary, it's the best thing I ever ate," he protested, "and I'm your debtor for life for giving me such a pleasure."

Mary laughed at his elaborate compliments and shrugged her shoulders at his ridiculous exaggerations, but in her heart she knew that everything was good, and that he was enjoying each mouthful. A simple salad came next, with a French dressing. She had longed to try her hand at mayonnaise, but there wasn't time, and lastly the doughnuts, crisp and feather-light and sugary, with clear, fragrant coffee, whose very aroma was exhilarating.

"Here's a toast to the cook," said Phil, lifting the fragile little cup, and smiling at her through the steam that crowned it:

"*Vive Marie!* Had Eve served her Adam ambrosia half as good as this, raw apples would have been no temptation, and they would have stayed on in Eden for ever!"

It certainly was pleasant to have scored such a success, and to have it appreciated by her little world.

They might have lingered around the table indefinitely had not a knock on the door announced that Mrs. Maguire had come. It was her afternoon to clean.

"So don't cast any anxious eyes at the dishes, Mary," announced Phil. "We planned other fish for you to fry, this afternoon. I proposed to the girls to take all three of you out for an automobile spin for awhile, winding up at a matinee, but Joyce and Betty refuse to be torn from their work. They've seen all the sights of New York and they've seen Peter Pan, and they won't 'play in my yard any more.' The only thing they consented to do was to offer your services to help me dispose of this last day of my vacation. Will you go?"

"Will I *go!*" echoed Mary, sinking back into the chair from which she had just risen. "Well, the only thing I'm afraid of is that my enjoyer will be totally worn out. It has stood the wear and tear of so many good times I don't see how it can possibly stand any more. Why, I've been fairly *wild* to see Peter Pan, and I've felt so green for the last few years because I've never set foot in an automo-

bile that you couldn't have chosen anything that would please me more."

"Hurry, then," laughed Phil. "You've no time to lose in getting ready. And don't you worry about your 'enjoyer' — it's the strongest part of your anatomy in my opinion. I've never known any one with such a capacity. It's forty-horse power at the very least."

Only a matinee programme was all that she brought back with her from that memorable outing, but long after it had grown yellowed and old, the sight of it in her keepsake box brought back many things. One was that sensation of flying, as they whirled through snowy parks and along Riverside drive, past historic places and world-famous buildings. And the delightful sense of being considered and cared for, and entertained, quite as if she had been a grown lady of six and twenty instead of just a little school-girl, six and ten.

How different the streets looked! Not at all as they had that morning, when she wandered through them, bewildered and lost. It was a gay holiday world, as she looked down on it from her seat beside Phil. She wished that the drive could be prolonged indefinitely, but there was only time for the briefest spin before the hour for the matinee.

More than all, the programme brought back that bewitching moment when, keyed to the highest pitch of expectation by the entrancing music of the orchestra, the curtain went up, and the world of Peter Pan drew her into its magic spell.

It was a full day, so full that there was no opportunity until nearly bedtime to explain to the girls the cause of her morning disappearance. It seemed fully a week since she had started out to find her lost shilling, and such a trivial affair now, obscured by all that had happened afterward. But the girls laughed every time they thought about it while they were undressing, and Mary heard an animated conversation begin some time after she had gone to bed in the studio davenport. She was too sleepy to take any interest in it till Betty called out:

"Mary, your escapade has given me the finest sort of a plot for a *Youth's Companion* story. I'm going to block it out while I am here, and finish it when we get back to school. If it is accepted I'll divide the money with you, and we'll come back on it to spend our Easter vacation here."

Mary sat up in bed, blinking drowsily. "I'm honestly afraid my enjoyer *is* wearing out," she said in a worried tone. "Usually the bare promise of such a thing would make me so glad that I'd lie

awake half the night to enjoy the prospect. But somehow I can't take it all in."

Fortunately it was a tired body instead of a tired spirit that brought this sated feeling, and after a long night's sleep and a quiet day at home, Mary was ready for all that followed: a little more sight-seeing, a little shopping, another matinee, and then the week-end at Eugenia's. The short journey to Annapolis and the few hours with Holland did not take much time from the calendar, but judged by the pages they filled in her journal, and all they added to her happy memories, they prolonged her holidays until it seemed she had been away from Warwick Hall for months, instead of only two short weeks.

CHAPTER X

HER SEVENTEENTH BIRTHDAY

"PLEASE, Miss Lewis, *please* do," came in a chorus of pleading voices, as half a dozen Freshmen surrounded Betty in the lower hall, one snowy morning late in January. "I think you *might* consent when we all want one so tremendously."

"Come on down, Mary Ware," called A.O., catching sight of a wondering face peering over the bannister, curious to see the cause of the commotion. "Come down here and help us beg Miss Lewis to be photographed. There's a man coming out from town this morning to take some snow scenes of the place, and we want her to pose for him. Sitting at the desk, you know, where she wrote her stories, with the editor's letter of acceptance in her hand. Some day when her fame is world-wide a picture of her wearing her first laurels will be worth a fortune."

"Oh, Betty! Have they really been accepted?" cried Mary, almost tumbling down the stairs in her excitement, and forgetting the respectful "Miss"

with which she always prefaced her name when with the other girls.

Betty waved a letter which she had just received. "Yes, the editor took them both, and wants more — a series of boarding-school stories. One of these girls heard me telling Miss Chilton about it," she added, laughing, "and to hear them you would think it is an event of national importance."

"It is to us," insisted A.O. "We are so proud to think it is *our* teacher, our special favourite one, who's turned out to be a sure-enough author, and we aren't going to let you go until you promise to sit for a picture for us."

"Then I suppose I shall be forced to promise," said Betty, smiling down into the eager faces which surrounded her, and breaking away from the encircling arms which held her determinedly. It was good to feel that she had the ardent admiration of her pupils, though it was burdensome sometimes to contemplate that so many of them took her as a model.

"I'm going to write too, some day," she overheard one of them say as she made her laughing escape. "I'd rather be an author than anything else in the world. It's so nice to dash off a new book every year or so and have a fortune come roll-

ing in, and everybody praising you and trying to make your acquaintance and begging for your autograph."

"It is not so easy as it sounds, Judith," Betty paused to say. "There's a long hard road to travel before one reaches such a mountain top as that. I've been at it for years, and I can only count that I've made a very small beginning of the journey."

Still, it seemed quite a good-sized achievement, when later in the morning she beckoned Mary into her room, and watched her eyes grow wide over the check which she showed her.

"One hundred dollars for just two short stories!" Mary exclaimed. "And you wrote most of them during Christmas vacation. Oh, Betty! How splendid!" Then she looked at her curiously. "How does it feel to be so successful at last, after being so bitterly disappointed?"

Betty, leaning forward against the desk, her chin in her hand, looked thoughtfully out of the window. Then after a pause she answered, "Glad and thankful — a deep quiet sort of gladness like a bottomless well, and a queer, uplifted buoyant feeling as if I had been given wings, and could attempt anything. There's nothing in the world," she added slowly, as if talking to herself, "quite so sweet as the realiza-

tion of one's ambitions. I was almost envious of Joyce when I saw her established in a studio, at last accomplishing the things she has always hoped to do. And it was the same way when I saw Eugenia so radiantly happy in the realizing of *her* ambition, to make an ideal home for Stuart and her father and to be an ideal mother to little Patricia. In their eyes she is not only a perfect house-keeper, but an adorable home-maker.

"Lloyd, too, is having what she wanted this winter, the social triumph that godmother and Papa Jack coveted for her. Her ambition is to measure up to all their fond expectations, and to leave a Road of the Loving Heart in every one's memory. And she is certainly doing that. Her popularity is the kind that cannot be bought with lavish dinners and extravagant balls. She's just so winsome and dear and considerate of everybody that she's earned the right to be called the Queen of Hearts."

"And now all four of you are happy," remarked Mary, "for your dreams have come true. And seeing that makes me all the more determined to make mine come true."

"Oh, the valedictory that you are to win for Jack's sake," said Betty, coming out of the revery into which she had fallen for a moment.

"That's only one of the things," began Mary. "The others — " Then she stopped, hesitating to put in words the future she foresaw for herself. Sometimes in the daylight it seemed presumptuous for her to aspire to such heights. It was only when she lay awake at night with the moonlight stealing into the room, that such a future seemed reasonable and sure.

Unknowing that the hesitation held a half-escaped confidence, Betty did not wait for her to go on, but held up the check, saying, "You know this is a partnership story, and you are to get another trip to New York out of it. Putting your shilling in the Christmas offering was a good investment for both of us. If you hadn't I never would have thought of the plot which your adventure suggested."

"But you've made your story so different from what actually happened, that I don't see how I can have any claim on it at all," said Mary. "It's just your sweet way of giving me Easter Vacation with Joyce."

"Indeed it is not," protested Betty. "Some day I'll follow out the whole train of suggestions for you, how your shilling made me think of an old rhyme, and that rhyme of something else, and so on,

until the whole plot lay out before me. There isn't time now. It is almost your Latin period."

Mary rose to go. "Once I should have been doubtful about accepting such a big favour from any one," she said slowly. "But I've found out now how delightful it is to do things for people you love with money you've earned yourself. Now Jack's watch-fob, for instance. He was immensely pleased with it. I know, not only from what he wrote himself, but from what mamma said. Yet his pleasure in getting it was not a circumstance to mine in giving it. Not that I mean it will be that way about the New York visit," she added hastily, seeing the amused twinkle in Betty's eyes. "Oh, *you* know what I mean," she cried in confusion. "That usually it's that way, but in this case it will be a thousand times blesseder to *receive,* and I never can thank you enough."

Throwing her arms around Betty's neck she planted an impetuous kiss on each cheek and ran out of the room.

Part of that first check went to the photographer, for every one of the fifteen Freshmen claimed a picture, and many of the Seniors who had worshipped her from afar when they were Freshmen, and she the star of the Senior class, begged the same favour.

The one which fell to Mary's share stood on her dressing-table several days and then disappeared. She felt disloyal when some of the other girls who kept theirs prominently displayed, came in and looked around inquiringly. She evaded their questions but was moved to confess to Betty herself one day.

"I — I — sent your picture to Jack. Just for him to look at and send right back, you know, but he won't send it. I hope you don't mind. He says he needs it to keep him from forgetting what the ideal American girl is like. They don't have them in Lone-Rock. There isn't any young society there at all. And he was so interested in hearing about your literary successes. You know he has always been interested in you ever since Joyce came back from the first house-party and told us about you."

That Betty blushed when Mary proceeded to further confessions and quoted Jack's remarks about her picture is not to be wondered at, and that Mary should see the blush and promptly report it in her next letter to Jack was quite as inevitable. She had no idea how many times during his busy days his glance rested on the photograph on his desk.

It was not the typical American girl as portrayed by Gibson or Christy, but it pleased him better in

every way. He liked the sweet seriousness of the smooth brows, the steady glance of the trustful brown eyes, and the little laughter lines about the mouth. Back in God's country, he sometimes mused, fellows knew girls like that. Played golf and tennis with them, rode with them, picnicked with them, sat out in the moonlight with them, talking and singing in a spirit of gay comradery that they only half-appreciated, because they had never starved for want of it as he was doing.

It hadn't been so bad at the Wigwam, for Joyce was always doing something to keep things stirred up; making the most of the material at hand. It wasn't that he minded the grind and the responsibility of his work. He would gladly have shouldered more in his zeal to push ahead. It was the thought that all work and no play was making him the proverbial dull boy, and that he would be an old man before his time, if he went on without anything to relieve the deadly monotony. The spirit of youth in him was crying out for kindred companionship.

All unconscious of the interest she was arousing, Mary filled her letters with reference to Betty; how they all adored her, and how she was always in demand as a chaperon, because she was just a girl herself and could understand how they felt and was

such good fun. Presently when word came that she had scored another triumph, that one of the leading magazines had accepted a short story, Jack was moved to send her a note of congratulation.

Now Jack had been as well known to Betty as she to him since the days of the long-ago house-party. When he made his brief visit to The Locusts just before she left for Warwick Hall, they had met like old friends, each familiar with the other's past. Unquestioningly she had accepted Papa Jack's estimate of him as the squarest young fellow he had ever met — "true blue in every particular, and a hustler when it comes to bringing things to pass."

Now for five months Mary had talked of him so incessantly, especially while they were visiting Joyce, that Betty had it impressed upon her mind beyond forgetting, that no matter what else he might be he was quite the best brother who had ever lived in the knowledge of man. In answer to her cordial little note of acknowledgment came a letter explaining in a frank straightforward way why he had kept her picture, and how he longed sometimes for the friendships and social life he could not have in a little mining town. And because there was a question in it about Mary, asking the advisability of her taking some extra course she had mentioned, Betty answered it promptly.

Thus it came about without her realizing just how it happened, that she was drawn into a regular correspondence. Regular on Jack's side, at least, for no matter whether she wrote or not, promptly every Thursday morning a familiar looking envelope, addressed in his big businesslike hand, appeared on her desk.

February came, not only with its George Washington tea and Valentine party, but musicales and receptions and many excursions to the city. No day with any claim to celebration was allowed to pass unheeded. March held fewer opportunities, so Saint Patrick was made much of, and Mary's sorority planned a spread up in the gymnasium in his honour. She had never once mentioned that her birthday fell on the seventeenth also, not even when she first proudly displayed her blood-stone ring, which they all knew was the stone for March.

Nobody would have known that she had any especial interest in the date, had not Jack mentioned in one of his letters to Betty that Mary would be seventeen on the seventeenth, and he was afraid that his remembrance would not reach her in time, as he had forgotten the day was so near until that very moment of writing.

The whisper that went around never reached

Mary. She helped decorate the table with sprigs of artificial shamrock and Irish flags, hunted up verses from various poets of Erin to write on the little harp-shaped place cards, and suggested a menu which typified the "wearin' o' the green" in every dish, from the olive sandwiches to the creme de menthe. To further carry out the colour scheme, the girls all came in their gymnasium suits of hunter's green, and the unconventional attire tended to make the affair more of a frolic than the elegant function which the sorority yearly aspired to give.

A huge birthday cake had been ordered in the jovial saint's honour, but nobody could tell how many candles it ought to hold since no one knew how many years he numbered. But Dorene solved the difficulty by saying, "Let X equal the unknown quantity, and just make a big X across the cake with the green candles."

Never once did Mary suspect that the spread was in her honour also, till she was led to the seat at the head of the table, where another birthday cake stood like a mound of snow with seventeen green candles all atwinkle. She was overwhelmed with so much distinction at first. The musical little acrostic by the sorority poet gratified her beyond expression. Cornie Dean's toast almost brought the tears it was

so sweet and appreciative, and the affectionate birthday wishes that circled around the table at candle-blowing time made her feel with a thankful heart that this early in her college life she had reached the best it has to offer, the inner circle of its friendships.

Each one told the funniest Irish bull she had ever heard, and then all sorts of conundrums and foolish questions were propounded, like, "Which would you prefer, to be as green as you look or to look as green as you are?" When the conversation touched on the birthstone for March, some one suggested that Mary ought to be made to do some stunt to show that she was worthy to wear a bloodstone, since it called for such high courage.

"Make her kiss the Blarney stone!" cried Judith Ettrick.

"At Blarney castle they let you down by the heels. That's the only way you can kiss the real stone. But Mary can hang by her knees from one of the turning-pole bars, and we'll build up a pyramid under her to put the Blarney stone on, so that she can barely reach it, you know. Make a shaky one that will topple over at a breath. That will make it harder to reach."

The suggestion was enthusiastically received by

all but Mary, who felt somewhat dubious about making the attempt, when she saw them begin to catch up glasses and plates from the table with which to build the pyramid. But by the time the structure was completed and topped by a little china match-safe in the shape of a cupid, to represent the Blarney stone, she was ready for her part of the performance.

"That's what you get for being born in Mars' month," said Elise, as Mary balanced herself a moment on the bar, and then made a quick turn around it to limber herself.

"You wouldn't be expected to do such things if the signs of your zodiac were different."

"Look out!" warned Cornie. "You'll see more stars than the ones in your horoscope if you lose your grip."

"Abracadabra!" cried Mary gamely. "May I hold on to the pole, and the pole hold on to me till we've done all that's expected of us."

It was a dizzy moment for Mary, and a breathless one for all of them as she swung head downward over the tottering pile of china and glass ware. The china cupid was almost beyond her reach, but by a desperate effort she managed to swing a fraction of an inch nearer, and seizing its head in her mouth came up gasping and purple.

"Now what about being born in Mars' month!" she demanded triumphantly of Elise as soon as she could get her breath. "A bloodstone will do more for you any day than an agate."

Taking this as a challenge, all sorts of feats were attempted to prove the superior virtues of each girl's birthstone charm, so that the performance ended in a gale of romping and laughter. Then at the last, to the tune of "They kept the pig in the parlour and that was Irish too," Mary was gravely presented on behalf of the sorority with the gift it had chosen for her.

"For your dowry," it was marked. It was a toy savings-bank in the form of a china pig, with a slit in its back, into which each member dropped seventeen pennies, as they sang in jolly chorus,

"Because it 's your seventeenth birthday,
March seventeen shall be mirth-day.
Oh, may you long on the earth stay,
With pence a-plenty too."

"That's an example in mental arithmetic," cried A.O. "Quick, Mary! Tell us how much your dowry amounts to. Seventeen times sixteen —"

But Mary was occupied with a discovery she had just made. "There are just seventeen of us count-

ing me!" she cried. "I never knew such a strange coincidence in numbers."

"If you save all your pennies till you have occasion for a dowry you'll have enough to buy a real pig," counselled Cornie wisely.

"More like a whole drove of them," laughed Mary. "That time is so far off."

"Not necessarily so far," was Cornie's answer. "Sometimes it is only a few steps farther when you are seventeen. Come on, before they turn out the lights on us."

Mary stopped in the door to look back at the room in which they had spent such a jolly evening. "I'd like to stop the clock right here," she declared, "and stay just at this age for years and years. It's so nice to be as *old* as seventeen, and yet at the same time to be as *young* as that."

Then she went skipping off to her room with the dowry pig in one hand and a green candle from the cake in the other, to report the affair to Ethelinda. They were not members of the same sorority, but they had many interests in common now. They had learned how to adjust themselves to each other. Mary still reserved her deepest confidences for her shadow-chum, but Ethelinda shared the rest.

CHAPTER XI

TROUBLE FOR EVERYBODY

Up in Joyce's studio, Easter lilies had marked the time of year for nearly a week. They had been ordered the day that Betty and Mary arrived to spend the spring vacation, and still stood fresh and white at all the windows, in the glory of their newly opened buds. They were Henrietta's contribution. Mrs. Boyd and Lucy were away.

On the wall over the desk the calendar showed a fanciful figure of Spring, dancing down a flower-strewn path, and Mary, opening her journal for the first time since her arrival, paused to read the couplet at the bottom of the calendar. Then she copied it at the top of the page which she was about to fill with the doings of the last five days.

> "How noiseless falls the foot of time
> That only treads on flowers."

"That must be the reason that I can hardly believe that three whole months have gone by since the Christmas holidays. I've trodden on nothing

but flowers. Even though the school work was a hard dig sometimes, I enjoyed it, and there was always so much fun mixed up with it, that it made the time fairly fly by. As for the five days we have been here in New York, they have simply whizzed past. Miss 'Henry' has done so much to make it pleasant for us. She is great. She calls herself a bachelor-maid, and if she is a fair sample of what they are, I'd like to be one. The day after we came she gave a studio reception, so that we could meet some of her famous friends. She wrote on a slip of paper, beforehand, just what each one was famous for, and the particular statue or book or painting that was his best known work, and instead of copying it, I'll paste the page in here to save time.

"It was a great event for Betty. Mrs. LaMotte, who does such beautiful illustrating for the magazines had seen Betty's last story, and asked her for her next manuscript. If *she* illustrates it, the pictures will be an open sesame to any editor's attention. She gave her so much encouragement too, and made some suggestions that Betty said would help her tremendously.

"One of the best parts of the whole affair to me was to see Joyce playing hostess in such a distinguished company. They all seem so fond of her,

and so interested in her work, that Miss Henrietta calls her 'Little Sister to the Great.'

"I thought that I'd be so much in awe of them that I couldn't say a word. But I wasn't. They were all so friendly and ordinary in their manners and so extraordinary in the interesting things they talked about that I had a beautiful time. I helped serve refreshments and poured tea. After they had all gone Joyce came over and took me by the shoulders, and said 'Little Mary, is it Time or Warwick Hall that has made such a change in you? You are growing up. You've lost your self-conscious little airs with strangers and you are no longer a chatter-box. I was *proud* of you!'

"Maybe I wasn't happy! Joyce never paid me very many compliments. None of my family ever have, so I think that ought to have a place in my good times book.

"I've had a perfect orgy of sight-seeing — gone to all the places strangers usually visit, and lots besides. We've been twice to the matinee. Phil has been here once to lunch, and is coming this afternoon to take us away out of town in a big touring-car. We're to stop at some wayside inn for dinner. Then we'll see him again when we go out to Eugenia's for a day and night. We've saved the best till the last."

"Letters," called Joyce, coming into the room with a handful. "The postman was good to every one of us." She tossed two across the room to Betty, who sat reading on the divan, and one to Henrietta, who had just finished cleaning some brushes.

"Oh, mine is from Jack!" cried Mary joyfully. "But how queer," she added in a disappointed tone, when she had torn open the envelope. "There are only six lines." Then exclaiming, "I wish you'd listen to this!" She read aloud:

"Mamma thinks that your clothes may be somewhat shabby by this time, so here's a little something to get some fine feathers with which to make yourself a fine bird. You will find check to cover remainder of year's expenses waiting for you on your return to school. Glad you are having such a grand time. Keep it up, little pard. — *Jack.*"

If Mary had not been so carried away with her good fortune, and so immediately engrossed in discussing the best way to spend the check she would have noticed that the envelope in Betty's lap was exactly like the one in her own, and that the same hand had addressed them both. Betty's first impulse was to read her letter aloud. It was so unusually breezy and amusing. But remembering

that she had never happened to mention her correspondence with Jack to Mary, and that her surprise over it might lead her to say something before Henrietta that would be embarrassing, she dropped it into her shopping bag as soon as she had read it, and said nothing about it.

That is how it happened to be with her when she accompanied Mary that afternoon on her joyful quest of "fine feathers." They went to many places, and at last found a dress which suited her and Joyce exactly. Some slight alteration was needed, and while the two were in the fitting room, Betty passed the time by taking out the letter for a second reading. A glance at the post-mark showed that it had been delayed somewhere on the road. It should have reached her the day that she left Warwick Hall. It had been forwarded from there. She had grown so accustomed to his weekly letter that she missed it when it did not come, and had wondered for several days why he had failed to write. Now she confessed to herself that she was glad the fault was with some postal clerk, and that Jack had not forgotten. She turned to the last page.

"I don't know why I should be telling you all this. I hope it does not bore you. I usually wait till my hopes and plans work out into something

practical before I mention them; but lately everything has gone so well that I can't help being sanguine over these new plans, and it makes their achievement seem nearer to talk them over with you. It certainly is good to be young and strong and feel your muscle is equal to the strain put upon it. This old world looks just about all right to me this morning."

When Mary came dancing out of the fitting room a few minutes later her first remark was so nearly an echo of Jack's that Betty smiled at the concidence.

"Oh, isn't this a good old world? Everybody is so obliging. They are going to make a special rush order of altering my dress, and send it out by special messenger early in the morning, so that I can have it to take out to Engenia's. I'm holding fast to my new spring hat, though. I can't risk that to any messenger boy. Phil will just have to let me take it in the automobile with us."

Promptly at the hour agreed upon, Phil met them at the milliner's. As Betty predicted he did laugh at the huge square bandbox which Mary clung to, and inquired for the bird-cage which was supposed to be its companion piece. But Mary paid little heed to his teasing, upheld by the thought of that perfect

dream of a white hat which the derided box contained. Her only regret was that she could not wear it for him to see. Joyce and the mirror both assured her that it was the most becoming one she ever owned, and it seemed a pity that it was not suitable for motoring. The wearing of it would have added so much to her pleasure. However, the thought of it, and of the new dress that was to be sent up in the morning, ran through her mind all that afternoon, like a happy undercurrent. She said so once, when Phil asked her what she was smiling about all to herself.

"It's just as if they were singing a sort of alto to what we are doing now, and making a duet of my pleasure; a *double* good time. Oh, I *wish* Jack could be here to see how happy he has made me!"

The grateful thought of him found expression a dozen times during the course of the drive. When they stopped for dinner at the quaint wayside inn she wished audibly that he were there. Somehow, into the keen enjoyment of the day crept a wistful longing to see him again, and the ache that caught her throat now and then was almost a homesick pang. Going back, as they sped along in the darkness towards the twinkling lights of the vast city,

she decided that she would write to him that very night, before she went to sleep, and make it clear to him how much she appreciated all he had done for her. He was the best brother in the world, and the very dearest.

Phil went up with them when they reached the entrance to the flats. He could not stay long, he said, but he must see the contents of that bandbox. The air of the studio was heavy with the fragrance of the Easter lilies, and he went about opening windows at Joyce's direction, while she and the other girls unwound themselves from the veils in which they had been wrapped, and put a few smoothing touches to their wind-blown hair. Joyce was the first to come back to the studio. She carried a letter which she had picked up in the hall.

"This seems to be a day for letters," she remarked. "This is a good thick one from home." She made no movement to open it then, thinking to read it aloud after Phil had taken his leave. But when Mary joined them, and he seemed absorbed in the highly diverting process they made of trying on the new hat, she opened the envelope to glance over the first few pages. She read the first paragraph with one ear directed to the amusing repartee. Then the smile suddenly left her face, and with a

startled exclamation she turned back to re-read it, hurrying on to the bottom of the page.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Mary in alarm. Joyce had looked up with a groan, her face white and shocked. She was trembling so that the letter shook perceptibly in her hand.

"There has been an accident out at the mines," she answered, trying to steady her voice, "and Jack was badly hurt. So very badly that mamma didn't telegraph us, but waited to see how it would terminate. Oh, he's better," she hurried to add, seeing Mary grow faint and white, and sit down weakly on the floor beside the bandbox. "He is going to live, the doctors say, but they're afraid —" Her voice faltered and she began to sob. "They're afraid he'll be a cripple for life! Never walk again!"

Throwing herself across the couch, she buried her face in the cushions, crying chokingly, "Oh, I can't *bear* to think of it! Oh, Jack! how could such an awful thing happen to *you!*"

Sick and trembling, Mary sat as if dazed by a blow on the head, her stunned senses trying to grasp the fact that some awful calamity had befallen them; that out of a clear sky had dropped a deadly bolt to shatter all the happiness of their little world. For an instant the thought came to her that maybe

she was only having a dreadful dream, and in a few moments would come the blessed relief of awakening. But instead came only the sickening realization of the truth, for Joyce, with an imploring gesture, held the letter out to Phil for him to read aloud.

Mrs. Ware had written as bravely as she could, trying not to alarm or distress them unduly, but there could be no disguising or softening one terrible fact. Jack, strong, sinewy, broad-shouldered Jack, whose strength had been his pride, lay as helpless as a baby, and all the hope the physicians could give was that in a few months he might be able to go about in a wheeled chair. They had had three surgeons up from Phœnix for a consultation. A trained nurse was with him at present and they must not worry. Of course they mustn't think of coming home. Joyce could do most good where she was, if later on they should have to depend on her partly, as one of the bread-winners. And Mary must make the most of the rest of the year at school. Jack had sent the check for the balance of her expenses only the morning before the accident occurred.

Mary waited to hear no more. With the tears streaming down her face, and her lips working pitifully, she scrambled up from the floor, and ran into

the next room, shutting the door behind her. The hurt was too deep for her to bear another moment, in any one's presence. She must go off with it into the dark alone.

There was a page or two more, giving some details of the accident. Some heavy timbers had fallen while they were making some extensions, and Jack had been crushed under them. The blow on the spine had caused paralysis of both limbs. When Phil finished the last sentence, he sat staring helplessly at the floor, wishing he could think of something to say; something comforting and hopeful, for Joyce's shoulders still heaved convulsively, and Betty was crying quietly over by the window. But he could find no grain of comfort in the whole situation. Mrs. Ware had rejoiced in the fact that his life had been spared, but to Phil, death seemed infinitely preferable to the crippled helpless half-existence which the future held out for poor Jack.

Of all the young fellows of his acquaintance, he could think of none on whom such a blow would fall more crushingly. He had counted so much on his future. Phil got up and began to pace back and forth at the end of the long studio, his hands in his pockets, recalling the days of their old intimacy on the desert. Scene after scene came up before him,

till he felt a tightening of the throat that made him set his teeth together grimly. Then Joyce sat up and began to talk about him brokenly, with gushes of tears now and then, as one recalls the good traits of those who have passed out of life.

"He was so little when papa died, but he's tried to take his place in every way possible, ever since. So unselfish and uncomplaining — always taking the brunt of everything! *You* know how it was, Phil. You saw him a thousand times giving up his own pleasure to make life easier for us. And it doesn't seem right that just when things were getting where he could reach out for what he wanted most, it should be snatched away from him!"

"I wish Daddy were home," sighed Phil. "I'd take him out for a look at him. I can't believe that it is so hopeless as all that. And anyhow, I've always felt that Daddy could put me together again if I were all broken to bits. He has almost performed miracles several times when everybody else gave the case up. But he won't be back for months and maybe a whole year."

"Oh, it's no use hoping, when the three best surgeons in Phœnix give such a report," said Joyce gloomily. "If it was anything but his spine, it wouldn't be so bad. We've just got to face the sit-

uation and acknowledge that it means he'll be a life-long invalid. And I know he'd rather have been killed outright."

"And it was just before his accident," said Betty, wiping her eyes, "that he wrote to me so jubilantly about his plans. He said he couldn't help being sanguine over them. It was so good to be young and strong and feel that your muscle was equal to the strain put upon it, and that the old world looked about all right to him that morning. It is going to be such a disappointment to him not to be able to send Mary back to school."

"Poor little Mary!" said Phil. "All this is nearly going to kill her. She is so completely wrapped up in Jack, I am afraid that it will make her bitter."

"Isn't it strange?" asked Betty. "I was wondering about that while we were out at the Inn this evening. She was in such high spirits, that I thought of that line from Moore:

> "'The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers,
> Is always the first to be touched by the thorns,'

and thought if she should take sorrow as intensely as she does her pleasures, any great grief would overwhelm her."

They had been discussing the situation for more than an hour, when the door from the bedroom opened, and Mary came out. Her eyes were red and swollen as if she had been crying a week, but she was strangely calm and self-possessed. She had rushed away from them an impetuous child in an uncontrollable storm of grief. Now as she came in they all felt that some great change had taken place in her, even before she spoke. She seemed to have grown years older in that short time.

"I am going home to-morrow," she announced simply. "I would start to-night if it wasn't too late to get the Washington train. I shall have to go back there to pack up all my things."

"But, Mary," remonstrated Joyce, "mamma said not to. She said positively we were to stay here and you were to make the most of what is left to you of this year at school."

"I know," was the quiet answer. "I've thought it all over, and I've made up my mind. Of course *you* mustn't go back. For no matter if the company does pay the expenses of Jack's illness and allows him a pension or whatever it was mamma called it, for awhile, you couldn't make fifty cents there where you could make fifty dollars here. So for all our sakes you ought to stay. But as long as I can't

finish my course, a few weeks more or less can't make any difference to me. And I know very well I am needed at home."

"But Jack — he'll be so disappointed if you don't get even one full year," argued Joyce, who had never been accustomed to Mary's deciding anything for herself. Even in the matter of hair-ribbons she had always asked advice as to which to wear.

"Oh, I can make it all right with Jack," said Mary confidently. "I wouldn't have one happy moment staying on at school knowing I was needed at home. And I *am* needed every hour, if for nothing more than to keep them all cheered up. When I think of how busy Jack has always been, and then those awful days and weeks and years ahead of him when he can't do anything but lie and think and worry, I'm afraid he'll almost lose his mind."

"If mamma only hadn't been so decided," was Joyce's dubious answer. "It does seem that you are right, and yet — we've never gone ahead and done things before without her consent. I wish we could talk it over with her."

"Well, I don't," persisted Mary. "I'm going home and I'm perfectly sure that down in her heart she'll be glad that I took matters in my own hands

and decided to come — for Jack's sake if nothing else."

"Then we'd better telegraph her to-night — "

"No," interrupted Mary, "not until I'm leaving Washington. Then it will be too late for her to stop me."

"Oh, dear, I don't know what to do about it," sighed Joyce wearily, passing her hand over her eyes.

"Just help me gather up my things," was the firm reply. The big bandbox still stood open in the middle of the floor and the hat with its wreath of white lilacs lay atop just as Mary had dropped it. She stooped to pick it up with a pathetic little smile that hurt Phil worse than tears, and stood looking down on it as if it were something infinitely dear.

"The last thing Jack ever gave me," she said as if speaking to herself. "It doesn't seem possible that it was only this afternoon we bought it. It seems months since then — my last happy day!"

Henrietta's latch-key sounded in the lock of the front door, and Phil rose to go, knowing the situation would all have to be explained to her. No, there was nothing he could do, they assured him. Nothing anybody could do. And promising to come

around before train-time next morning he took his leave, heart-sick over the tragedy that had ruined Jack's life, and would always shadow the little family that had grown as dear to him as his own.

CHAPTER XII

THE GOOD-BYE GATE

FORTUNATELY they were so late in getting to the station that there was no time for a prolonged leave-taking. Phil hurried away to the baggage-room to check their trunks. Henrietta made a move as if to follow. Her overwrought sympathies kept her nervously opening and shutting her hands, for she dreaded scenes, and would not have put herself in the way of witnessing a painful parting, had she not thought she owed it to Joyce to stand by her to the last.

Joyce noticed the movement, and divining the cause, said with a little smile, as she laid a detaining hand on her arm, "Don't be scared, Henry. We are not going to have any high jinks, are we, Mary. We made the old Vicar's acquaintance too early in the game and have been practising his motto too many years to go back on him now. We're going to keep inflexible, no matter what happens. Aren't we, Mary?"

For several minutes Mary had been seeing things through a blur of tears, which came at the thought of what a long parting this might be. There was no telling when she would see Joyce again. It might be years. But she answered a resolute yes, and Joyce went on.

"Why, we taught it even to Norman when he wasn't more than a baby. 'Swallow your sobs, and stiffen,' we'd say, and he'd gulp them down every time, and brace up like a little soldier. Oh, if I'd just flop and let myself go I could cry myself into a shoestring in five minutes. But thanks to early discipline we're not going to do it. Are we, Mary?"

By this time Mary could only shake her head in reply, but she did it resolutely, and the determination carried her safely through the parting with Joyce. But Phil almost broke down the self-control she was struggling to maintain, when he came back with the checks and hurried aboard the train with her and Betty. Taking both her hands in his he looked down with both voice and face so full of tender sympathy, that her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears.

"You brave little thing!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "If there is ever anything that I can do to

make it easier, let me know, and I'll come. Promise me now. You'll let me know."

"I — I promise," she answered, faltering over the sob that rose in her throat as she tried to speak, but smiling bravely up at him.

With one more hand-clasp that spoke sympathy and understanding even more than his words had done, and somehow left her with a sense of being comforted and protected, he went away. But half way down the aisle he turned and dashed back, drawing a little package from his pocket as he came.

"Something to read on the way," he explained. "Wait till you get to that lonesome stretch of desert." Then with a smile that she carried in her memory for years, he said once more, "Good-bye, little Vicar! Remember, I'll come!"

He swung down the steps at the front end of the car just as the train started, and through the open window she had one more glimpse of him, as he stood there lifting his hat. Farther back, at the station gate Joyce waited with her arm linked in Henrietta's, for the moment when Mary's last glance should be turned to seek her. She met it with a blithe wave of her handkerchief, and Mary waved vigorously in response. It was a long time before she turned away from the window. When

she did she had nearly recovered her self-control, and grateful for Betty's considerate silence, she busied herself with her suit-case a few minutes, fumbling with the lock, and making a pretence of repacking, in order to find room for the book that Phil had brought.

The night before, in the first numb apathy of the shock, it had seemed to her that nothing mattered any more. Nothing could make the dreadful state of affairs more bearable; but now she acknowledged to herself that some things did help. How wonderfully comforting Phil's assurance of sympathy had been; the silent assurance of that firm, tender hand-clasp. It was easier to be brave since he had called her so and expected it of her.

Betty, in a seat across the aisle, opened a magazine, but Mary could not settle down to read. A nervous unrest kept her going over and over in her mind, as she had done through the previous night, the scenes that lay ahead of her. There was the packing, and she checked off on her fingers the many details that she must be sure to remember. There were those borrowed books she mustn't forget to return. Her scissors were in Cornie's room. Miss Gilmer had her best basketry patterns. There were so many things that finally she made a memorandum

of them, dully wondering as she did so how she could think of them at all. One would have supposed that the awful disaster that was continually in her thoughts would have blotted out these little commonplace trivial concerns. But they didn't. She couldn't understand it.

Presently the sound of a low crooning in the seat behind her made her glance over her shoulder. An old coloured mammy, in the whitest of freshly starched aprons and turbans, was rocking a child to sleep in her arms. He was a dear little fellow, pink and white as an apple-blossom, with a Teddy bear hugged close in his arms. One furry paw rested on his dimpled neck. The bit of Uncle Remus song the nurse was singing had a soothing effect on him, but it fell dismally on Mary's ears:

> "Oh, don't stay long! Oh, don't stay late!
> My honey, my love.
> Hit ain't so mighty fur ter de Good-bye Gate,
> My honey, my love!"

"The Good-bye Gate!" she repeated to herself. That was what they had come to now, she and Jack. Not a little wicket through which one might push his way back some day, but a great barred thing that was clanging behind them irrevocably, shutting them away for ever from the fair road

along which they had travelled so happily. Shutting out even the slightest view of those far-off "Delectable Mountains," towards which they had been journeying. In the face of Jack's misfortune and all that he was giving up, her part of the sacrifice sank into comparative insignificance. Her suffering for him was so great that it dulled the sharpness of her own renunciations, and even dulled her disappointment for Joyce. The year in Paris had meant as much to her as the course at Warwick Hall had meant to Mary.

All through the trip she sat going round and round the same circle of thoughts, ending always with the hopeless cry, "Oh, *why* did it have to be? It isn't right that *he* should have to suffer so!" Once when the train stopped for some time to take water and wait on a switch for the passing of a fast express, she opened her suit-case and took out her journal and fountain-pen. Going on with the record from the place where she had dropped it the day before when Jack's letter interrupted it, she chronicled the receipt of the check, the shopping expedition that followed, and the gay outing afterward in the touring-car. Then down below she wrote:

"But now I have come to the Good-bye Gate.

Good-bye to all my good times. So good-bye, even to you, little book, since you were to mark only the hours that shine. Here at the bottom of the page I must write the words, '*The End.*'"

When they reached Warwick Hall she was too tired to begin any preparations that night for the longer journey, and still so dazed with the thought of Jack's calamity to be keenly alive to the fact that this was the last night she would ever spend in the beloved room. She was thankful to have it to herself for these last few hours, and thankful when Betty and Madam Chartley finally went out and left her alone. She was worn out trying to keep up before people and to be brave as they bade her. It was a relief to put out the light and, lying there alone in the dark, cry and cry till at last she sobbed herself to sleep.

Not till the next morning did she begin to feel the wrench of leaving, when the fresh fragrance of wet lilacs awakened her, blowing up from the old garden where all the sweetness of early April was astir. Then she remembered that she would be far, far away when the June roses bloomed at Commencement, and that this was the last time she would ever be wakened by the blossoms and bird-calls of the dear old garden.

She sat up and looked around the room from one familiar object to another, oppressed and miserable at the thought that she would never see them again. Then her glance rested on Lloyd's picture, and for once the make-believe companionship of Lloyd's shadow-self brought a comfort as deep as if her real self had spoken. She held out her arms to it, whispering brokenly:

"Oh, *you* understand how hard it is, don't you, dear? You're the only one in the world who does, because you had to give up all this, too."

Gazing at the pictured face through her tears, she recalled how Lloyd had met *her* disappointment, trying to live each day so unselfishly that she could go on, stringing the little pearls on her rosary.

"If you could do it, I can too," she said presently. "And the best of having such a chum is I needn't leave you behind when I leave school. You are one thing that I don't have to give up."

That picture was the last thing she put into her trunk. She left it hanging on the wall while she did all the rest of her packing, that she might glance at it now and then. It helped wonderfully to remember that Lloyd had had the same experience. Madam Chartley came in while she was in the midst of her preparations for leaving, glad to find her

making them with her usual energy and interest. When in answer to her offers of assistance Mary assured her there was nothing any one could do, she said, "I'll not stay then, except to say one thing that I may not have opportunity for later." She paused and laid her hands on Mary's shoulders, looking down at her searchingly and kindly.

"I want you to know this — that I have never had a pupil whom I parted from as reluctantly as I shall part from you. Your enthusiasm and love of school have been a joy to your teachers and an inspiration to every girl in Warwick Hall. If it were merely a matter of expense I would not let you go, but under the circumstances I have no right to interfere. You ought to go. And my dear little girl, remember this, whenever regrets come up for the school days brought so suddenly to a close, that school is only to prepare us to meet the tests of life, and already you have met one of its greatest — *'To renounce when that shall be necessary, and not be embittered!'* And you are doing that so bravely that I want you to know how much I admire and love you for it."

To Madam's surprise the words of praise did not carry the comfort she intended. Mary's arms were thrown around her neck and a tearful face hidden

on her shoulder, as leaning against her she sobbed, "Oh, Madam Chartley! I wish you could feel that way about me, but honestly I haven't stood the test. I can renounce for myself, and not feel bitter, but I can't renounce for Jack! It makes me *wild* whenever I think of all he has to give up. It isn't right! How could God let such an awful thing happen to him, when he has always lived such a beautiful unselfish life?"

Drawing her to a seat beside the window, Madam sat with an arm around her, until the sobs grew quiet, and then began to answer her question — the same old cry that has gone up from stricken souls ever since the world began. And Mary, listening, felt the comfort and the uplift of a strong faith that had learned to go unfaltering through the sorest trials, knowing that out of the worst of them some compensating good should be wrested in the end. For months afterwards, whenever that bitter cry rose to her lips again, she stilled it with the remembrance of those words. Sometime, somehow, even this terrible calamity should be made the stepping-stone to better things. How such a thing could come to pass Mary could not understand, but Madam's faith that such would be so, comforted her. It was as if one little glimmering star strug-

gled out through the blackness of the night, and in the light of that she plucked up courage to push on hopefully through the dark.

That afternoon just as her trunk was being carried out, the 'bus drove up, bringing back its first instalment of returning pupils. Cornie Dean was among them, and Elise and A.O. Mary, looking out of the window, heard the familiar voices, and feeling that their questions and sympathy would be more than she could bear, caught up her hat and hand-baggage, and ran over to Betty's room to wait there until time to go.

"No, I can't see any of them, *please*," she begged, when Betty came in to say how distressed and shocked they all were to hear about Jack, and to know that she was leaving school. They were all crying over it, and wanted to see her, if only for a moment.

"No," persisted Mary. "It would just start me all off again to hear one sympathetic word, and my eyes are like red flannel now. I've already said good-bye to Madam, and I'm going to slip out without speaking to another soul."

"You'll have to speak to Hawkins," said Betty. "For he is lying in wait for you with such a box of lunch as never went out of this establishment

before. He asked Madam's permission to put it up for you himself. He told her about your binding up his hands the day the chafing-dish turned over and burned him so badly, and about the letter you wrote for one of the maids that got her sister into a school for the blind, and several other things, winding up with 'There's a young lady with a *'eart* in 'er, Ma'am!'"

Betty mimicked his accent so well that Mary laughed for the first time since her return. "Well, he's got a 'eart in *'im!*" she answered, "though I never would have imagined it the day I made my entrance here. He was like a grand, graven image. Oh, Betty, it *is* nice to know that people like you and are sorry that you are going. Even if it does make you feel sort of weepy it takes a big part of the sting out of leaving."

Betty went with her in to Washington, and stayed with her until the train left. Hawkins was the only one they encountered on their way out, and Mary took the proffered lunch-box with a smile that was very close to tears. Her voice faltered over her words of thanks, and when she had been handed into the 'bus she dared not trust herself to look back at the faithful old servitor in the doorway. Once, just as they swung around the curve that hid the

beautiful grounds from sight, she leaned out for one more look, then hastily pulled down her veil.

At the station, as they sat waiting for her train, Betty said, "I'll write every week and tell you all the news, but don't feel that you must answer regularly. I know how your time will be occupied. But I should like a postal now and then, telling me how Jack is. You know," she went on, stooping to retie her shoe, "he and I have been corresponding for some time, and I think of him as one of my oldest and best friends. I shall always be anxious for news of him."

Betty could fairly feel the surprise in Mary's face, even though she was stooping forward too far to see it, and she heard with inward amusement her astonished exclamations. "Well, of all things! I didn't know you were writing to each other! Jack never said a word about it, and yet he sent you a message nearly every time he wrote to me!"

She was still puzzling about it when her train was called, and she had to take leave of Betty. All too soon the last familiar face was out of sight, and the long, lonely journey home was begun.

It was near the close of the third day's journey when she remembered Phil's book and took it out of

its wrappings. She was not in a reading humour, but time hung heavy, and he had said to open it when she reached the desert. Besides, she was a trifle curious to see what kind of a book he had chosen for her. It was a very small one. She could soon skim through it.

"*The Jester's Sword*" was the title. Not a very attractive subject for any one in her mood, she thought. It would be a sorry smile at best that the gayest of jesters could bring to her. She turned the leaves listlessly, then sat up with an air of attention. There on the title-page was a line from Stevenson, the very thing Madam Chartley had said to her the day she left Warwick Hall. "*To renounce when that shall be necessary, and not be embittered.*"

Phil had chosen wisely after all if his little tale were to tell her how to do it. Then a paragraph on the first page claimed her attention. "*Because he was born in Mars' month, the bloodstone became his signet, sure token that undaunted courage would be the jewel of his soul.*"

Why, she and Jack were both born in Mars' month, and each had a bloodstone, and each had to answer to an awful call for courage. It was dear

of Phil to choose such an appropriate story. Settling herself comfortably back in the seat, she began to read, never dreaming what a difference in all her after life the little tale was to make.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JESTER'S SWORD

Because he was born in Mars' month, which is ruled by that red war-god, they gave him the name of a red star — Aldebaran; the red star that is the eye of Taurus. And because he was born in Mars' month, the bloodstone became his signet, sure token that undaunted courage would be the jewel of his soul.

Now all his brothers were as stalwart and as straight of limb as he, and each one's horoscope held signs foretelling valorous deeds. But Aldebaran's so far out-blazed them all, with comet's trail and planets in most favourable conjunction, that from his first year it was known the Sword of Conquest should be his. This sword had passed from sire to son all down a line of kings. Not to the oldest one always, as did the throne, though now and then the lot fell so, but to the one to whom the signs all pointed as being worthiest to wield it.

So from the cradle it was destined for Aldebaran,

and from the cradle it was his greatest teacher. His old nurse fed him with such tales of it, that even in his play the thought of such an heritage urged him to greater ventures than his mates dared take. Many a night he knelt beside his casement, gazing through the darkness at the red eye of Taurus, whispering to himself the words the old astrologers had written, *"As Aldebaran the star shines in the heavens, so Aldebaran the man shall shine among his fellows."*

Day after day the great ambition grew within him, bone of his bone and strength of his sinew, until it was as much a part of him as the strong heart beating in his breast. But only to one did he give voice to it, to the maiden Vesta, who had always shared his play. Now it chanced that she, too, bore the name of a star, and when he told her what the astrologers had written, she repeated the words of her own destiny:

"As Vesta the star keeps watch in the heavens above the hearths of mortals, so Vesta the maiden shall keep eternal vigil beside the heart of him who of all men is the bravest."

When Aldebaran heard that he swore by the bloodstone on his finger that when the time was ripe for him to wield the sword he would show the

world a far greater courage than it had ever known before. And Vesta smiling, promised by that same token to keep vigil by one fire only, the fire that she had kindled in his heart.

One by one his elder brothers grew up and went out into the world to win their fortunes, and like a restless steed that frets against the rein, impatient to be off, he chafed against delay and longed to follow. For now the ambition that had grown with his growth had come to be more than bone of his bone and strength of his sinew. It was an all-consuming desire which coursed through him even as his heart's blood; for with the years had come an added reason for the keeping of his youthful vow. Only in that way could Vesta's destiny be linked with his.

When the great day came at last for the Sword to be put into his hands, with a blare of trumpets the castle gates flew open, and a long procession of nobles filed through. To the sound of cheers and ringing of bells, Aldebaran fared forth on his quest. The old king, his father, stepped down in the morning sun, and with bared head Aldebaran knelt to receive his blessing. With his hand on the Sword he swore that he would not come home again, until he had made a braver conquest than had ever been

made with it before, and by the bloodstone on his finger the old king knew that Aldebaran would fail not in the keeping of that oath.

With the godspeed of the villagers ringing in his ears, he rode away. Only once he paused to look back, when a white hand fluttered at a casement, and Vesta's sorrowful face shone down on him like a star. Then she, too, saw the bloodstone on his finger as he waved her a farewell, and she, too, knew by that token he would fail not in the keeping of his oath.

'Twas passing wonderful how soon Aldebaran began to taste the sweets of great achievement. His name was on the tongue of every troubador, his deeds in every minstrel's song. And though he travelled far to alien lands, scarce known by hearsay even to the folk at home, his fame was carried back, far over seas again, and in his father's court his name was spoken daily in proud tones, as they recounted all his honours.

Young, strong, with the impetuous blood begotten of success tingling through all his veins, he had no thought that dire mishap could seize on *him;* that pain or malady or mortal weakness could pierce *his* armour, which youth and health had girt about him. From place to place he went, wherever there

was need of some brave champion to espouse a weak one's cause. It mattered not who was arrayed against him, whether a tyrant king, a dragon breathing fire, or some hideous scaly monster that preyed upon the villages. His Sword of Conquest was unsheathed for each; and as his courage grew with every added victory, he thirsted for some greater foe to vanquish, remembering his youthful vow.

And as he journeyed on he pictured often to himself the day of his returning, the day on which his vow should find fulfilment. How wide the gates would be thrown open for his welcome! How loud would swell the cheers of those who thronged to do him honour! His dreams were always of that triumphal entrance, and of Vesta's approving smile. Never once the shadow of a thought stole through his mind that it might be far otherwise. Was not he born for conquest? Did not the very stars foretell success?

One night, belated in a mountain pass, he sought the shelter of a shelving rock, and with his mantle wrapped about him lay down to sleep. Upon the morrow he would sally forth and beard the Province Terror in his stronghold; would challenge him to combat, and after long and glorious battle would rid

the country of its dreaded foe. Already tasting victory, he fell asleep, a smile upon his lips.

But in the night a storm swept down the mountain pass with sudden fury, uprooting trees a century old, and rending mighty rocks with sword thrusts of its lightning. And when it passed Aldebaran lay prone upon the earth borne down by rocks and fallen trees. Lay as if dead until two passing goat-herds found him and bore him down in pity to their hut.

Long weeks went by before the fever craze and pains began to leave him, and when at last he crawled out in the sun, he found himself a poor misshapen thing, all maimed and marred, with twisted back and face all drawn awry, and foot that dragged. One hand hung nerveless by his side. Never more would it be strong enough to use the Sword. He could not even draw it from its scabbard.

As in a daze he looked upon himself, thinking some hideous nightmare had him in its hold. "This is not *I!*" he cried, in horror at the thought. Then as the truth began to pierce his soul, he sat with starting eyes and lips that gibbered in cold fear, the while they still persisted in their fierce denial. "This is not *I!*"

Again he said it and again as if his frenzied words

could work a miracle and make him as he was before. Then when the sickening sense of his calamity swept over him like a flood in all its fulness, he cast himself upon the earth and prayed to die. Despair had seized him. But Death comes not at such a call; kind Death, who waits that one may have a chance to rise again and grapple with the foe that downed him, and conquering, wipe the stigma coward from his soul.

So with Aldebaran. At first it seemed that he could not endure to face the round of useless days now stretching out before him. An eagle, broken-winged and drooping in a cage, he sat within the goat-herd's hut and gloomed upon his lot, and cursed the vital force within that would not let him die.

To fall asleep with all the world within one's grasp and waken empty-handed — that is small bane to one who may spring up again, and by sheer might wrest all his treasures back from Fortune. But to wake helpless as well as empty-handed, the strength for ever gone from arms that were invincible; to crawl, a poor crushed worm, the mark for all men's pity, where one had thought to win the meed of all men's praise, ah, then to live is agony! Each breath becomes a venomed adder's sting.

Most of all Aldebaran thought of Vesta. The stroke that marred his comeliness and took his strength had robbed him of all power to win his happiness. It was written "by the hearth of him who is the bravest she shall keep eternal vigil." As yet he had not risen above the level of his forbears' bravery, only up to it. Now 'twas impossible to show the world a greater courage, shorn as he was of strength. And even had her horoscope willed otherwise, and she should come to him all filled with maiden pity to share his ruined hearth, he could not say her yea. His man's pride rose up in him, rebellious at the thought of pity from one in whose sight he fain would be all that is strong and comely. Looking down upon his twisted limbs, the pain that racked him was greater torture than mere flesh can feel. Although 'twas casting heaven from him, he drew his mantle closer, hiding his disfigured form, and prayed with groans and writhings that she might never look on him again. So days went by.

There came a time when, even through his all-absorbing thought of self, there pierced the consciousness that he no longer could impose upon the goat-herds' bounty. Food was scarce within the hut, and even though he groaned to die, the dawns brought hunger. So at the close of day he dragged

him down the mountainside, thinking that under cover of the dusk he would steal into the village and seek a chance to earn his bread.

But as he neared the little town and the sound of evening bells broke on his ear, and lighted windows marked the homes where welcome waited other men, he winced as from a blow. This was the village he had thought to enter in the midst of loud acclaims, its brave deliverer from the Province Terror. Then every window in the hamlet would have blazed for him. Then every door would have been set wide to welcome Aldebaran, the royal son of kings, fittest to bear the Sword of Conquest. And now Aldebaran was but the crippled makeshift of a man, who could not even draw that Sword from out its scabbard; at whose wry features all must turn away in loathing, and some perchance might even set the dogs to snarling at his heels, in haste to have him gone.

"In all the world," he cried in bitterness, "there breathes no other man whom Fate hath used so cruelly! Emptied of hope, robbed of my all, life doth become a prison-house that dooms me to its lowest dungeon! Why struggle any longer 'gainst my lot? Why not lie here and starve, and thus

force Death to turn the key, and break the manacles which bind me to my misery?"

While he thus mused, footsteps came up the mountainside, a lusty voice was raised in song, and before he could draw back into cover, a head in a fantastic cap appeared above the bushes. It was the village Jester capering along the path as if the world were thistledown and every day a holiday. But when he saw Aldebaran he stopped agape and crossed himself. Then he pushed nearer.

Now those who saw the Jester only on a market day or at the country fair plying his trade of merriment for all 'twas worth knew not a sage was hid behind that motley or that his sympathies were tender as a saint's. Yet so it was. The motto written deep across his heart was this: "*To ease the burden of the world!*" It was beyond belief how wise he'd grown in wheedling men to think no load lay on their shoulders. Now he stood and gazed upon the prostrate man who turned away his face and would not answer his low-spoken words: "What ails thee, brother?"

It boots not in this tale what wiles he used to gain Aldebaran's ear and tongue. Another man most surely must have failed, because he shrank from pity as from salt rubbed in a wound, and felt

that none could hear his woeful history and not bestow that pity. But if the Jester felt its throbs he gave no sign. Seated beside him on the grass he talked in the light tone that served his trade, as if Aldebaran's woes were but a flight of swallows 'cross a summer sky, and would as soon be gone. And when between his quirks he'd drawn the piteous tale entirely from him, he doubled up with laughter and smote his sides.

"And I'm the fool and thou'rt the sage!" he gasped between his peals of mirth. "Gadzooks! Methinks it is the other way around. Why, look ye, man! Here thou dost go a-junketing through all the earth to find a chance to show unequalled courage, and when kind Fate doth shove it underneath thy very nose, thou turn'st away, lamenting. I've heard of those who know not beans although the bag be opened, and now I laugh to see one of that very kind before me."

Then dropping his unseemly mirth and all his wanton raillery, he stood up with his face a-shine, and spake as if he were the heaven-sent messenger of hope.

"Rise up!" he cried. "*Knowest thou not it takes a thousandfold more courage to sheathe the sword when one is all on fire for action than to go*

forth against the greatest foe? Here is thy chance to show the world the kingliest spirit it has ever known! Here is a phalanx thou mayst meet all single-handed — a daily struggle with a host of hurts that cut thee to the quick. This sheathèd sword upon thy side will stab thee hourly with deeper thrusts than any adversary can give. 'Twill be a daily 'minder of thy thwarted hopes. For foiled ambition is the hydra-headed monster of the Lerna marsh. Two heads will rise for every one thou severest. 'Twill be a fight till death. Art brave enough to lift the gauntlet that Despair flings down and wage this warfare to thy very grave?"

Such call to arms seemed mockery as Aldebaran looked down upon his twisted limbs, but as the bloodstone on his finger met his sight his kingly soul leapt up. "I'll keep the oath!" he cried, and struggling to his feet laid hand upon the jewelled hilt that decked his side.

"By sheathèd sword, since blade is now denied me," he swore. "I'll win the future that my stars foretold!"

In that exalted moment all things seemed possible, and though his body limped as haltingly he followed on behind his new-found friend, his spirit walked erect, and faced his future for the time, undaunted.

His merry-Andrew of a host made festival when they at last came to his dwelling; lit a great fire upon the hearth, brewed him a drink that warmed him to the core, brought wheaten loaves and set a bit of savoury meat to turning on the spit.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "They say it is an ill wind that blows good to none. Now thou dost prove the proverb. The tempest that didst blow thee from thy course mayhap may send me on my way rejoicing. I long have wished to leave this land and seek the distant province where my kindred dwell, but there was never one to take my place. And when I spake of going, my townsmen said me nay. 'Twas quite as bad, they vowed, as if the priest should suddenly desert his parish, with none to shepherd his abandoned flock. 'Who'll cheer us in our doldrums?' they demanded. 'Who'll help us bear out troubles by making us forget them? Thou canst not leave us, Piper, until some other merry soul comes by to set our feet a-dancing.' Now thou art come."

"Yes, *I!* A merry soul indeed!" Aldebaran cried in bitterness.

"Well, maybe not quite that," his host admitted. "But thou couldst pass as one. Thou couldst at least put on my grotesque garb, couldst learn the

quips and quirks by which I make men laugh. Thou wouldst not be the first man who has hid an aching heart behind a smile. The tune thou pipest may not bring *thee* pleasure, but if it sets the world to dancing it is enough. And, too, it is an honest way to earn thy bread. Canst think of any other?"

Aldebaran hid his face within his hands. "No, no!" he groaned. "There is no other way, and yet my soul abhors the thought, that I, a king's son, should descend to this! The jester's motley and the cap and bells. How can *I* play such a part?"

"Because thou *art* a king's son," said the Jester. "That in itself is ample reason that thou shouldst play more royally than other men whatever part Fate may assign thee."

Aldebaran sat wrapped in thought. "Well," was the slow reply after long pause, "an hundred years from now, I suppose, 'twill make no difference how circumstances chafe me now. A poor philosophy, but still there is a grain of comfort in it. I'll take thy offer, friend, and give thee gratitude."

And so next day the two went forth together. Aldebaran showed a brave front to the crowd, glad of the painted mask that hid his features, and no one guessed the misery that lurked beneath his laugh, and no one knew what mighty tax it was

upon his courage to follow in the Jester's lead and play buffoon upon the open street. It was a thing he loathed, and yet, 'twas as the Jester said, his training in the royal court had made him sharp of wit and quick to read men's minds; and to the countrymen who gathered there agape, around him in the square, his keen replies were wonderful as wizard's magic.

And when he piped — it was no shallow fluting that merely set the rustic feet a-jig, it was a strange and stirring strain that made the simplest one among them stand with his soul a-tiptoe, as he listened, as if a kingly train with banners went a-marching by. So royally he played his part, that even on that first day he surpassed his teacher. The Jester, jubilant that this was so, thought that his time to leave was near at hand, but when that night they reached his dwelling Aldebaran tore off the painted mask and threw himself upon the hearth.

"'Tis more than flesh can well endure!" he cried. "All day the thought of what I've lost was like a constant sword-thrust in my heart. Instead of deference and respect that once was mine from high and low, 'twas laugh and jibe and pointing finger. And, too, (his voice grew shrill and querulous) "I saw young lovers straying in the lanes together.

How can I endure that sight day after day when my arms must remain for ever empty? And little children prattled by their father's side no matter where I turned. I, who shall never know a little son's caress felt like a starving man who looks on bread and may not eat. Far better that I crawl away from haunts of men where I need never be tormented by such contrasts."

The Jester looked down on Aldebaran's wan face. It was as white and drawn as if he had been tortured by the rack and thumbscrew, so he made no answer for the moment. But when the fire was kindled, and they had supped the broth set out in steaming bowls upon the table, he ventured on a word of cheer.

" At any rate," he said, " for one whole day thou hast kept thy oath. No matter what the anguish that it cost thee, from sunrise till sunsetting thou hast held Despair at bay. It was the bravest stand that thou hast ever made. And now, if thou hast lived through this one day, why not another? 'Tis only one hour at a time that thou art called on to endure. Come! By the bloodstone that is thy birthright, pledge me anew thou'lt keep thy oath until the going down of one more sun."

So Aldebaran pledged him one more day, and

after that another and another, until a fortnight slowly dragged itself away. And then because he met his hurt so bravely and made no sign, the Jester thought the struggle had grown easier with time, and spoke again of going to his kindred.

"Nay, do not leave me yet," Aldebaran plead. "Wouldst take my only crutch? It is thy cheerful presence that alone upholds me."

"Yet it would show still greater courage if thou couldst face thy fate alone," the Jester answered. "Despair cannot be vanquished till thou hast taught thyself to really feel the gladness thou dost feign. I've heard that if one will count his blessings as the faithful tell their rosary beads he will forget his losses in pondering on his many benefits. Perchance if thou wouldst try that plan it might avail."

So Aldebaran went out determined to be glad in heart as well as speech, if so be it he could find enough of cheer. "I will be glad," he said, "because the morning sun shines warm across my face." He slipped a golden beam upon his memory string.

"I will be glad because that there are diamond sparkles on the grass and larks are singing in the sky." A dew-drop and a bird's trill for his rosary.

"I will be glad for bread, for water from the spring, for eyesight and the power to smell the bud-

ding lilacs by the door; for friendly greetings from the villagers."

A goodly rosary, symbol of all the things for which he should be glad, was in his hand at close of day. He swung it gaily by the hearth that night, recounting all his blessings till the Jester thought, "At last he's found the cure."

But suddenly Aldebaran flung the rosary from him and hid his face within his hands. "'Twill drive me mad!" he cried. "To go on stringing baubles that do but set my mind the firmer on the priceless jewel I have lost. May heaven forgive me! I am not really glad. 'Tis all a hollow mockery and pretence!"

Then was the Jester at his wit's end for reply. It was a welcome sound when presently a knocking at the door broke on the painful silence. The visitor who entered was an aged friar beseeching alms at every door, as was the custom of his brotherhood, with which to help the sick and poor. And while the Jester searched within a chest for some old garments he was pleased to give, he bade the friar draw up to the hearth and tarry for their evening meal, which then was well-nigh ready. The friar, glad to accept the hospitality, spread out his lean hands to the blaze, and later, when the three sat down to-

gether, warmed into such a cheerfulness of speech that Aldebaran was amazed.

"Surely thy lot is hard, good brother," he said, looking curiously into the wrinkled face. "Humbling thy pride to beg at every door, forswearing thine own good in every way that others may be fed, and yet thy face speaks of an inward joy. I pray thee tell me how thou hast found happiness."

"*By never going in its quest,*" the friar answered. "Long years ago I learned a lesson from the stars. Our holy Abbot took me out one night into the quiet cloister, and pointing to the glittering heavens showed me my duty in a way I never have forgot. I had grown restive in my lot and chafed against its narrow round of cell and cloister. But in a word he made me see that if I stepped aside from that appointed path, merely for mine own pleasure, 'twould mar the order of God's universe as surely as if a planet swerved from its eternal course.

"'No shining lot is thine,' he said. 'Yet neither have the stars themselves a light. They but reflect the Central Sun. And so mayst thou, while swinging onward, faithful to thy orbit, reflect the light of heaven upon thy fellow men.'

"Since then I've had no need to go a-seeking happiness, for bearing cheer to others keeps my own

heart a-shine. I pass the lesson on to thee, good friend. Remember, men need laughter sometimes more than food, and if thou hast no cheer thyself to spare, why, thou mayst go a-gathering it from door to door as I do crusts, and carry it to those who need."

Long after the good friar had supped and gone, Aldebaran sat in silence. Then crossing to the tiny casement that gave upon the street, he stood and gazed up at the stars. Long, long he mused, fitting the friar's lesson to his own soul's need, and when he turned away, the old astrologer's prophecy had taken on new meaning.

"As Aldebaran the star shines in the heavens" (*no light within itself, but borrowing from the Central Sun*), "so Aldebaran the man might shine among his fellows." (*Beggared of joy himself, yet flashing its reflection athwart the lives of others.*)

When next he went into the town he no longer shunned the sights that formerly he'd passed with face averted, for well he knew that if he would shed joy and hope on others he must go to places where they most abound. What matter that the thought of Vesta stabbed him nigh to madness when he looked on hearth-fires that could never blaze for him? With courage almost more than human he put

that fond ambition out of mind as if it were another sword he'd learned to sheathe. At first it would not stay in hiding, but flew the scabbard of his will to thrust him sore as often as he put it from him. But after awhile he found a way to bind it fast, and when he'd found that way it gave him victory over all.

A little child came crying towards him in the market-place, its world a waste of woe because the toy it cherished had been broken in its play. Aldebaran would have turned aside on yesterday to press the barbed thought still deeper in his heart that he had been denied the joy of fatherhood. But now he stooped as gently as if he were the child's own sire to wipe its tears and soothe its sobs. And when with skilful fingers he restored the toy, the child bestowed on him a warm caress out of its boundless store.

He passed on with his pulses strangely stirred. 'Twas but a crumb of love the child had given, yet, as Aldebaran held it in his heart, behold a miracle! It grew full-loaf, and he would fain divide it with all hungering souls! So when a stone's throw farther on he met a man well-nigh distraught from many losses, he did not say in bitterness as once he would have done, that 'twas the common lot

of mortals; to look on him if one would know the worst that Fate can do. Nay, rather did he speak so bravely of what might still be wrung from life though one were maimed like he, that hope sprang up within his hearer and sent him on his way with face a-shine.

That grateful smile was like a revelation to Aldebaran, showing him he had indeed the power belonging to the stars. Beggared of joy, no light within himself, yet from the Central Sun could he reflect the hope and cheer that made him as the eye of Taurus 'mong his fellows.

The weeks slipped into months, months into years. The Jester went his way unto his kindred and never once was missed, because Aldebaran more than filled his place. In time the town forgot it ever had another Jester, and in time Aldebaran began to feel the gladness that he only feigned before.

And then it came to pass whenever he went by men felt a strange, strength-giving influence radiating from his presence, — a sense of hope. One could not say exactly what it was, it was so fleeting, so intangible, like warmth that circles from a brazier, or perfume that is wafted from an unseen rose.

Thus he came down to death at last, and there was dole in all the Province, so that pilgrims, jour-

neying through that way, asked when they heard his passing-bell, "What king is dead, that all thus do him reverence?"

"'Tis but our Jester," one replied. "A poor maimed creature in his outward seeming, and yet so blithely did he bear his lot, it seemed a kingly spirit dwelt among us, and earth is poorer for his going."

All in his motley, since he'd willed it so, they laid him on his bier to bear him back again unto his father's house. And when they found the Sword of Conquest hidden underneath his mantle, they marvelled he had carried such a treasure with him through the years, all unbeknown even to those who walked the closest at his side.

When, after many days, the funeral train drew through the castle gate, the king came down to meet it. There was no need of blazoned scroll to tell Aldebaran's story. All written in his face it was, and on his scarred and twisted frame; and by the bloodstone on his finger the old king knew his son had failed not in the keeping of his oath. More regal than the royal ermine seemed his motley now. More eloquent the sheathed sword that told of years of inward struggle than if it bore the blood of dragons, for on his face there shone the peace that comes alone of mighty triumph.

The king looked round upon his nobles and his stalwart sons, then back again upon Aldebaran, lying in silent majesty.

"Bring royal purple for the pall," he faltered, "and leave the Sword of Conquest with him! No other hands will ever be found worthier to claim it!"

That night when tall white candles burned about him there stole a white-robed figure to the flower-strewn bier. 'Twas Vesta, decked as for a bridal, her golden tresses falling round her like a veil. They found her kneeling there beside him, her face like his all filled with starry light, and round them both was such a wondrous shining, the watchers drew aside in awe.

"'Tis as the old astrologers foretold," they whispered. "Her soul hath entered on its deathless vigil. In truth he was the bravest that this earth has ever known."

The porter was lighting the lamps when Mary finished reading. There was one directly above her. She moved her hand so that the light fell on her zodiac ring, and sat turning it this way and that to watch the dull gleams. By the bloodstone on her finger she was vowing that her courage should fail not in helping Jack "pick up the gauntlet which

Despair flung down, and wage the warfare to his very grave."

All the way through the story she had read Jack for Aldebaran, and it should be her part to play the rôle of the Jester who had led him back to hope. She opened the book again at the sentence, "The motto written deep across his heart was this: '*To ease the burden of the world.*'" Henceforth that should be her aim in life, to ease Jack's burden. Together, "by sheathed sword since blade was now denied him," they would prove his right to the Sword of Conquest.

Some great load seemed to lift itself from her own shoulders as she made this resolution. She was glad that she had been born in Mars' month. She was glad that this little story had fallen in her way.

It gave her hope and courage. Beggared of joy himself, Jack should yet be "as the eye of Taurus 'mong his fellows."

CHAPTER XIV

BACK AT LONE-ROCK

All the rest of the way to Lone-Rock, Mary's waking moments were spent in anticipating her arrival and planning diversions for the days to follow. Now that she was so near, she could hardly wait to see the family. The seven months that she had been away seemed seven years, judging by her changed outlook on life. She felt that she had gone away a mere child, and that she was coming back, years old and wiser. She wondered if they would notice any difference in her.

That Mrs. Ware did, was evident from their moment of greeting. Never before had she broken down and sobbed on Mary's shoulder as she did now. Always she had been the comforter and Mary the one to be consoled, but for a few moments their positions were reversed. Conscious that her coming had lifted a burden from her mother's shoulders, the burden of enduring her anxiety alone, she tiptoed into Jack's room, ready to begin playing the

" OUT ON THE PORCH SHE HEARD FROM NORMAN HOW IT HAD HAPPENED."

Jester at once with some merry speech which she was sure would bring a smile.

But he was lying asleep, and the jest died on her lips as she stood and gazed at him. She had expected him to look ill, but his face, white and drawn with great dark shadows under his closed eyes, was so much ghastlier than she had pictured, that it was a shock to find him so. She stole out of the room again to the sunny little back porch, as sick at heart as if she had seen him lying in his coffin. He was no more like the strong jolly big brother she had left, than the silent shadow of him. She was thankful that her first sight of him had been while he was asleep. Otherwise she must have betrayed her surprise and distress.

Out on the porch she heard from Norman how it had happened. Jack had seen the danger that threatened two of the workmen, and had sprung forward with a warning cry in time to push them out of the way, but had been caught himself by the falling timbers. The miners had always liked Jack, Norman told her. He could do anything with them. And now they would get down and crawl for him if it would do any good.

From her mother and the nurse Mary heard about the operation that had been made to relieve

the pressure on the spinal cord. It seemed successful as far as it went. They could not hope to do more than to make it possible for him to sit up in a wheeled chair. The injury had been of such a peculiar character that they were fortunate to accomplish even that much. It would be several weeks before he could attempt it. Jack did not know yet how seriously he had been injured. They were afraid to tell him until he was stronger. The Company was paying all the expenses of his illness, and there was an accident insurance.

At first Mary insisted on sending away Huldah, the faithful woman who had been the maid of all work in her absence, protesting that "a penny saved was a penny earned," and that she herself was amply able to do the work, and that she could economize even if she couldn't bring in any money to the family treasury. But she was soon persuaded of the wisdom of keeping her. The nurse was to leave as soon as Jack was able to sit up, and Mary would have her hands full then. He would need constant attendance at first, the nurse told her, and since he could never take any exercise, only daily massage would keep up his strength.

"I shall begin teaching you how to give it just as soon as he rallies a little more," the nurse prom-

ised. "You will have to be both hands and feet for him for many a week to come, poor boy, and feet always. It is good that you are so strong and untiring yourself."

For awhile Mary went about feeling like a visitor, since there was little for her to do either in kitchen or sick-room. Jack had not yet reached the stage when he needed amusement. He seemed glad that she was home, and his eyes followed her wistfully about the room, but he did not attempt to talk much. Sometimes the emptiness of the hours palled on her till she felt that she could not endure it. She wrote long letters to Joyce and Betty and all the schoolgirls with whom she wanted to keep up a correspondence. She mended everything she could find that needed mending, and she spent many hours telling her mother all that had happened in her absence. But for once in her life her usual resources failed her.

The little mining camp of Lone-Rock was high up in the hills, so that April there was not like the Aprils she had known at the Wigwam. There were still patches of snow under the pine trees above the camp. But the stir of spring was in the air, and every afternoon, while Mrs. Ware was resting, Mary slipped away for a long walk. Sometimes she

would scramble up the hill-side to the great overhanging rock which gave the place its name, and sit looking down at the tiny village below. It was just a cluster of miners' shacks, most of them inhabited by Mexicans. There were the Company's stores and the post-office, and away at the farther end of the one street were the houses of the few American families who had found their way to Lone-Rock, either on account of the mines or the healthful climate of the pine-covered hills. She could distinguish the roof of their own cottage among them, and the chimney of the little, unpainted schoolhouse.

She wondered what the outcome of all their troubles was to be. She couldn't go on in this aimless way, day after day. She must find something to do that would pay her a salary, and it must be something that she could do at home, where she would be needed sorely as soon as the nurse left. Then she would go over and over the same little round. She might teach. She knew that she could pass the examination for a license, but the school was already supplied with a competent teacher, of many years' experience, whom the trustees would undoubtedly prefer to a seventeen year old girl just fresh from school herself.

There was stenography — that was something she could master by herself, and at home, but there was already a stenographer in the Company office, and there was no other place for one in Lone-Rock. Round and round she went like one in a treadmill, always to come back to the starting point, that there was nothing she could do in Lone-Rock to earn money, and she *must* earn some, and she could not go away from home. Sometimes the hopelessness of the situation gave her a wild caged feeling, as if she must beat herself against the bars of circumstance and make them give way for her pent-up forces to find an outlet.

The only thing that Mrs. Ware could suggest was that they might advertise in the Phoenix papers for summer boarders. She had been told that the year before several camping parties had pitched tents near Lone-Rock, and they had said that if there were a good boarding place in the village it could be filled to overflowing with a desirable class of guests.

So Mary spent an evening, pencil in hand, calculating the probable expenses and income from such a venture. They could not go into it on a large scale, the house was too small. The cost of living was high in Lone-Rock, and the market limited to the canned goods on the shelves of the Company's

stores. Her careful figuring proved that there would be so little profit in the undertaking that it would not pay to try. But the evening was not lost. It suggested the vegetable garden, which with Norman's help she proceeded to start the very next morning.

Plain spading in unbroken sod is not exactly what a boy of thirteen would call sport, and Norman started at the task with little enthusiasm. But Mary, following vigorously in his wake with hoe and rake, spurred him on with visions of the good things they should have to eat and the fortune they should make selling fresh garden stuff to the summer campers, till he caught some of her indomitable spirit, and really grew interested in the work. Mary confined her energies to the vegetables which she knew would grow in that locality, and which would be sure to find a ready sale, but Norman gradually enlarged the borders to make experiments of his own, till all the lot back of the house was a well tilled garden.

If it had done nothing but keep her employed out of doors many hours of the day it would have been well worth the effort, for it kept her from brooding over her troubles, and largely took away the caged feeling which had made her so desperate. As the

fresh green shoots came up through the soil and she counted the long straight rows, she counted also the dimes each one ought to bring to the family purse, and drew a breath of relief. They would amount to a neat little sum by the end of the season, and by that time maybe some other way would be opened up for her to earn money at home. True, not all the things they planted came up. Fully a third of the garden "failed to answer to roll call," Norman said, but those that did respond to their diligent care amply made up for the failure of the others.

Jack's room in the wing of the cottage had a south door over-looking the garden, and it was a happy day for the entire household when he asked to know what was going on out there. He could not see the garden from the corner where his bed stood, but the nurse propped a large mirror up against a chair in a way to reflect the entire scene. Norman was vigorously hoeing weeds, and Mary, armed with a large magnifying glass, was on a hunt for the worms that were threatening the young plants.

The scene seemed to amuse Jack immensely, and entirely aroused out of his apathy, he began to ask questions, and to suggest various dishes that he would like to sample as soon as the garden could

furnish them. Every morning after that he called for the mirror to see how much the garden had grown in the night. It was an event when the first tiny radish was brought in for him to taste, and a matter of family rejoicing, when the first crisp head of lettuce was made into a salad for him, because his enjoyment of it was so evident.

About that time he was able to be propped up in bed a little while each day, and was so much like his old cheerful self that Mary wrote long hopeful letters to Joyce and Betty about his improvement. He joked with the nurse and talked so confidently about going back to work, that Mary began to feel that her worst fears had been unfounded, and that much of her mental anguish on his account had been unnecessary. Sometimes she shared his hopefulness to such an extent that she half regretted leaving school before the end of the year. When the girls wrote about the approaching Commencement and the good times they were having, and of how they missed her, she thought how pleasant it would have been to have had at least the one whole year with them. She was afraid she would be sorry all the rest of her life that she had missed those experiences of Commencement time. The exercises were always so beautiful at Warwick Hall.

She could not wholly regret her return, however, when she saw how much Jack depended on her for entertainment. He was ready to hear all about her escapades at school now, and hours at a time she talked or read to him, choosing with unerring instinct the tales best suited to his mood. Phil kept them supplied with all the current magazines. Phil had been so thoughtful about that, and his occasional letters to Jack had made red-letter days on Mary's calendar. They had been almost as good as visits, they were so charged with his jolly, lighthearted spirit.

But it happened, that the story she intended to read Jack first, *The Jester's Sword,* still lay unopened on her table. She could not even suggest his likeness to Aldebaran while he talked so hopefully of what he intended to do as soon as he was out of bed. It was evident that he did not realize the utter hopelessness of his condition, or he could not have made such big plans for the future.

"Of course I appreciate your leaving school in the middle of the term," he told her. "It's good for mamma to have you here, and it's fine for me, too, to have you look after me. But I'm sorry you were so badly frightened that you thought it necessary. You'll have to pay up for this holiday, Missy. I

shall expect you to study all summer to make up lost time, so that you can catch up with your class and enter Sophomore with them next fall."

To please him she brought out her books and studied awhile every day, reciting her French and Latin to her mother, and wrestling along with the others as best she could. Then, too, it was impossible not to be affected to some extent by his spirit of hopefulness, and several times she gave herself up to the bliss of dreaming of the joyful thing it would be, if he should prove to be right and she could go back to Warwick Hall in the fall. Then, one day the surgeons came up from Phoenix again and made their examination and experiments, and after that the lessons and the day-dreams stopped. Everything stopped, it seemed.

They told him the truth because he would have nothing else, although they shrank from doing it until the last moment of their stay. They knew it would be like giving him his death-blow. Mary, standing in the door, saw the look of unspeakable horror that stole slowly over his face, then his helpless sinking back among the pillows, and the twitching of his hands as he clenched them convulsively. Not a word or a groan escaped him, but the wild despair of his set face and staring eyes was more

than she could endure. She rushed out of the room and out of the house to the little loft above the woodshed, where no one could hear her frantic sobbing. It was hours before she ventured back into the house. It would only add to his misery to see her distress, she knew, so she left him to the little mother's ministrations.

Anticipating such a result, the surgeons had brought several appliances to make his confinement less irksome. There was a hammock arrangement with pulleys, by which he might be swung into different positions, and out into a wheeled chair. They fastened the screws into walls and ceiling, put the apparatus in place and carefully tested it before leaving. Then they were at the end of their skill. They could do nothing more. There was nothing that could be done.

Several times in the days that followed, the nurse spoke of the brave way in which Jack seemed to be meeting his fate. But Mrs. Ware shook her head sadly. She knew why no complaint escaped him. She had seen him act the Spartan before to spare her. Mary, too, knew what his persistent silence meant. He was not always so careful to veil the suffering which showed through his eyes when he was alone with her. She knew that half the time

when he appeared to be listening to what she was reading, he was so absorbed in his bitter thoughts that he did not hear a word. *"An eagle, broken-winged and drooping in a cage, he gloomed upon his lot and cursed the vital force within that would not let him die."*

One morning, when he had been settled in his wheeled chair, she brought out the story of the Jester's Sword, saying, tremulously, "Will you do something for me, Jack? Read this little book yourself. I know you don't halfway listen to what I read any more, and I don't blame you, but this seems to have been written just on purpose for you."

He took the book from her listlessly, and opened it because she wished it. Watching him from the doorway, she waited until she saw him glance up from the opening paragraph to the watch-fob lying on the stand at his elbow. Then he looked back at the page, with a slight show of interest, and she knew that the reference to Mars' month and the bloodstone had caught his attention as it had hers. Then she left him alone with it, hoping fervently it would arouse in him at least a tithe of the interest it had awakened in her.

When she came back after awhile he merely

handed her the book, saying in an indifferent way, "A very pretty little tale, Mary," and leaned back in his chair with closed eyes, as if dismissing it from his thoughts. She was disappointed, but later she saw him sitting with it in his hand again, closed over one finger as if to keep the place, while he looked out of the window with a faraway expression in his eyes. Later the nurse asked her what book it was he kept under his pillow. He drew it out occasionally, she said, and glanced at one of the pages as if he were trying to memorize it.

That he had at last read it as she read it, putting himself in the place of Aldebaran, Mary knew one day from an unconscious reference he made to it. A sudden wind had blown up, scattering papers and magazines across the room, and fluttering his curtains like flags. She ran in to pick up the wind-blown articles and close the shutters. When everything was in order, as she thought, she turned to go out, but he stopped her, saying almost fretfully, "You haven't picked up that picture that blew down." When she glanced all around the room, unable to discover it, he pointed to the hearth. A photograph had fallen from the mantel, face downward.

"There! *Vesta's* picture!"

Mary picked it up and turned it over, exclaiming, "Why, no, it is Betty's!"

"That's what I said," he answered, wholly unconscious of his slip of the tongue that had betrayed his secret. Her back was turned towards him, so that he could not see the tears which sprang to her eyes. If already it had come to this, that Betty was the Vesta of his dreams, then his renunciation must be an hundredfold harder than she had imagined.

With a pity so deep that she could not trust herself to speak, she busied herself in blowing some specks of dust from the mantel, as an excuse to keep her back turned. She was relieved when the nurse came in with a glass of lemonade and she could slip out without his seeing her face. She sat down on the back steps, her arms around her knees to think about the discovery she had just made. It made her heart-sick because it added so immeasurably to the weight of Jack's misfortune.

"Oh, *why* did it have to be?" she demanded again of fate. "It is too cruel that everything the dear boy wanted most should be denied him."

With her thoughts centred gloomily on his injuries, it seemed almost an insult for the sun to shine or for any one to be happy, and she was in no mood to meet any one in a different humour from

her own. Added to her dull misery on Jack's account, was a baffled, disappointed feeling that she had not been the comfort to him she had hoped to be. True, she was learning to give him the massage he needed with almost as skilful a touch as the nurse, but she could not see that she had eased his burden mentally, in the least, although she had tried faithfully to carry out the good friar's suggestion. It seemed so hard, when she was ready to make any sacrifice for him, no matter how great, even to exchanging her strength for his helplessness, that the means should be denied her.

While she sat there, longing for some great Angel of Opportunity to open the way for her to help him, a little one was coming in at the back gate, so disguised that she did not recognize it as such. She was even impatient at the interruption. Norman, followed by a half grown Mexican boy trundling a wheel-barrow, came up from the barn, with a whole train of smaller boys running alongside, to support the chicken coop he was wheeling. Norman's face shone with importance, and he called excitedly as he fumbled at the gate latch, "Look, Mary! You can't guess what we've got in this box! A young wild-cat! Lúpe wants to sell him."

"For mercy's sake, Norman Ware," she an-

swered, impatiently, "haven't we enough trouble now without your bringing home a wild-cat to add to them? And *now,* of all times!"

The tone carried even more disapproval than her words. It seemed to insinuate that if he had the proper sympathy for Jack he would not be thinking of anything else but his affliction. Instantly the bright face clouded, and in an injured tone he began to explain:

"I thought brother would like to see it, and he could make the trade for me. He talks Mexican, and I only know a few words. I couldn't make the boys understand more than that they were to bring it along. I don't see why Jack's being sick should keep me from having a nice pet like a wild-cat. He isn't a bit mean, and I haven't had a single thing since the puppy was poisoned."

The procession had paused, and the piercingly bright eyes of each one of the little Mexicans seemed also to be asking why. Mary suddenly had to acknowledge to herself that there wasn't any good reason to prevent. Because one brother was desperately unhappy was no reason why she should cloud the enjoyment of the other one by refusing him something on which he had set his heart.

Norman could not understand the lightning

change in her, but he followed joyfully when she answered with a brief, "Well, come on," and led the way around to the south door of Jack's room, and called his attention to the embryo menagerie outside.

To her surprise, for the first time since the surgeons' last visit, Jack laughed. It was an amusing group, the wild-cat in the chicken-coop with its body-guard of dirty, grinning little Mexicans, and Norman circling excitedly around them, explaining that Lúpe asked a dollar for it, but that he could only give fifty cents, and for Jack to make him understand.

Jack did make him understand, and conducted the trade to Norman's entire satisfaction. Then recognizing Lúpe as one of the boys he had seen around the office, he began to question him in Mexican about the mines and the men. Then it developed that Lúpe was the son of one of the men who had been saved by Jack's quick warning, and when the boy repeated what some of the miners had said about him, Jack grew red and did not translate it all. The part he did translate was to the effect that the men wanted him back at the mine. They were having trouble with the "fat boss," their name for the new manager.

The little transaction and talk with the boys seemed to cheer Jack up so much that Mary mentally apologized to the wild-cat for her inhospitable reception, and electrified Norman by an offer to help him build a more suitable cage for it than the coop in which it was confined. Norman, who had unbounded faith in Mary's ability as a carpenter, accepted her offer joyfully. She wasn't like some girls he had known. When she drove a nail it held things together, and whatever she built would be strong enough to hold any beast he might choose to put in it.

"Now, if I could get a couple of coyotes and a badger and a fox or two," he remarked, "I'd be fixed."

Mary, who was sorting over a pile of old boards back of the woodshed, paused in alarm.

"It strikes me, young man," she said, a trifle sarcastically, "that the more some people get the more they want. Your wishes seem to be on the Jack's Bean-stalk scale. They grow to reach the sky in a single night. Suppose you did have those things, you wouldn't be satisfied. It would be a zebra and a giraffe and a jungle tiger next."

"No, it wouldn't," he declared. "I wouldn't

" WHEN SHE DROVE A NAIL IT HELD THINGS TOGETHER."

know how to take care of them, but I do know how to feed the things that live around here."

"What do you want them for?"

"Well, you know what Huldah said about summer campers. There's always a lot of boys along, and if I had a sort of menagerie they'd want to come over and play circus, and then they'd let me in on their ball-games and things. It's awful lonesome with school out and Billy Downs gone back East. There's so few fellows here my age, and Jack won't let me play much with the little Mexicans. They aren't much fun anyhow when I can't talk their lingo."

Mary straightened up, hammer in hand, and squinted her eyes thoughtfully, a way she had when something puzzled her. It had not occurred to her that Norman had social longings like her own which Lone-Rock failed to satisfy. He watched her anxiously. That preoccupied squint always meant that interesting developments would follow.

"Norman Ware," she said, slowly, "I didn't give you credit for being a genius, but you are as great in one way as Emerson. You've hit on one of his ideas all by yourself. He said, 'If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbours,

though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten track to his door.' If you want company as bad as all that, you *shall* have a beaten track to your door. We'll build something better than the neighbours ever dreamed of, and it won't be a mouse-trap, either. There's enough old lumber here to build half a dozen cages, and if you'll pay for the wire netting out of your share of the garden profits, I'll help you put up a menagerie that P. T. Barnum himself wouldn't have been ashamed of."

Norman's answer was a whoop and a double somersault, and he came up on his feet again remarking that she was worth all the fellows in Lone-Rock put together.

"According to what you've just said that isn't very much of a compliment," laughed Mary. Still it gratified her so much that presently she was planning a side-show for the menagerie. There were all her mounted specimens of trap-door spiders and butterflies and desert insects. She would loan the collection occasionally, and her stuffed Gila monster and the arrow-heads and rattle-snake skins that she and Holland had collected.

As she hammered and sawed she told Norman the story of *The Jester's Sword*. "That is one reason

I am taking so much interest in this," she explained. "I've been thinking for days about what the old friar said, that men need laughter sometimes more than food, and if we haven't any cheer to spare ourselves, we may go a-gathering it from door to door as he did crusts and carry it to those who need. That is why I have gone on long walks and made so many calls on the few people that are here, so that I'd have something amusing to tell Jack when I came home. But he has seemed to find my 'crusts of cheer' mighty dry food, and he didn't take half the interest in them that he did in talking to Lúpe to-day."

"Lúpe will make a beaten track to *his* door fast enough," prophesied Norman, "when he finds we want to buy more animals. I'll send word to-night to him to set his traps for those coyotes and foxes."

That evening after supper, Jack wheeled himself out on to the porch. It was the first time he had attempted it, and when he had made the trip successfully, he sat a few minutes watching the stars. They seemed unusually brilliant, and he amused himself in tracing the constellations with which he was familiar. It had been a family study at the Wigwam, and they had learned many things from

the little Atlas of the Heavens which Mrs. Ware kept among her other old school books. Presently he called Mary.

"I've located Taurus. See, just over that tree top. And there is its red eye, Aldebaran. I wanted you to see what a jolly twinkle he has to-night."

It was the first direct reference he had made to the story, and Mary waited expectantly for him to go on.

"Don't you worry, little pard," he said, after a pause. "I've known all along how you felt about me. But I'm not knocked quite out of the game, even if I am such a wreck. I felt so until I had that talk with Lúpe, as if there was no use of my cumbering the ground any longer. But I found out a lot from him. The men want me back. They don't understand the new boss at all. They will do anything for me. So even if I can't walk I can be worth at least half a man to the Company, in just being on the spot to interpret and to keep things running smoothly. I could attend to the correspondence, too, for my head and hands are all right. I know I am as helpless as a baby yet, but if you'll just stand by me, and keep up that treatment, and help me get my strength back, I'll make good, some way or another, just as well as Aldebaran did. By

the bloodstone on my watch-fob!" he added, laughingly. "How is that for a fine swear?"

The old hopeful note in his voice made his helplessness more pathetic than ever to Mary, but she answered gaily, "You know I'll stand by you till 'the last cock crows and the last trump blows!' *You* didn't have to be born in Mars month to make undaunted courage the jewel of your soul."

Perched on the arm of his chair she sat watching the red star for a moment, thinking of the events which had led to his resolution. "It's queer, isn't it," she said aloud. "I almost drove Norman away this afternoon with his beast and his train of little Mexicans. I was so out of patience with him for bringing them here. But how is one to know an Opportunity when it comes in a chicken-coop disguised as a Wild-cat?"

CHAPTER XV

KEEPING TRYST

An hundred times that summer, Jack made the story of Aldebaran his own. He had his rare, exalted moments, when all things seemed possible; when despite his helpless body his spirit walked erect, and faced his future for the time undaunted. He had his daily struggle with the host of hurts which cut him to the quick, the reminders of his thwarted hopes and foiled ambitions. Then, too, there were times when the only way he could keep up his courage was to repeat grimly through set teeth, "'Tis only one hour at a time that I am called on to endure. By the bloodstone that is my birthright, I'll keep my oath until the going down of one more sun." Before the summer was over it came to pass that more than one soul, given fresh courage by his brave example, looked upon him as the villagers had upon Aldebaran: "A poor, maimed creature in his outward seeming, and yet so blithely does he bear his lot it seems a kingly spirit dwells among us."

Mary's letters to Joyce began to take on a cheerful tone that was vastly encouraging to the toiler in the studio.

"We have revised Emerson," she wrote one July morning. "It is fully as true to say, 'If one can make a better garden, show a bigger circus or put up a more cheerful front to Fate than his neighbours, though he build his house in Lone-Rock, the world will make a beaten track to his door.' The path it has made to ours is a wide one. The boys swarm here all hours of the day, to Norman's delight, the summer campers make our garden the Mecca of their morning pilgrimages, and the cheerful front we put up to Fate seems to be the magnet that draws them back again in the afternoons.

"Really, our shady front porch reminds me sometimes of a popular Summer Resort piazza, it is so gay and chatty. The ladies of the camp come over nearly every day and bring their sewing and fancy work, and Huldah and I serve tea. It would do you good to see how mamma enjoys Mrs. Levering and Mrs. Seldon. They're like the friends she used to have back in Plainsville, and this is the first really good social time she has had since we left there.

"Professor Levering and Professor Seldon seem

to find Jack so congenial. They talk to him by the hour on the scientific subjects he loves. It is a Godsend to him to have such a diversion. Mrs. Levering said to me this morning that he is a daily wonder to them all, and a rebuke as well. 'We think *we* have troubles,' she said, 'until we come over here. Then you make them seem so insignificant that we are ashamed to label them troubles. Oh, you Wares; I never saw such a family! You fairly radiate cheerfulness. I wish you'd tell me how you do it.'

"I told her I supposed it was because we were all such copy-cats. First we imitated the old Vicar of Wakefield so many years that it gave us a cheerful bent of mind, and lately we'd taken the story of Aldebaran to heart and were imitating him and the other Jester. She said, 'Commend me to copy-cats. I'm glad I discovered the species.'

"I am telling you all this in order that you may see that we have managed to keep inflexible to the extent of impressing our neighbours, at least, and there is no need for you to worry about us any more. I hope you will accept Eugenia's invitation and spend that two weeks at the sea-shore in the idlest, most care-free way you can think of, and not give one anxious thought to us. True, our day

of great things is over. We no longer lay large plans, and sweep the heavens with a telescope, looking for pleasure on a large scale, among the stars. But it is wonderful how many little things we find now that we used to let slip unheeded, since we've gone to looking for them with a microscope."

Two days later another letter was sent post-haste to Joyce, written in a hurried scrawl with a pencil, clearly showing Mary's agitation.

"Something exciting has happened at last! The Leverings brought a friend to call this afternoon, who has just arrived in Lone-Rock to spend the rest of vacation with them; a grumpy, middle-aged, absent-minded, old professor from the East, who seemed rather bored with us at first. But when he was taken out to the side-show in the 'Zoo,' he waked up in a hurry. His very spectacles gleamed and his gray whiskers bristled with interest when he saw my assortment of pressed wild-flowers from the desert, and the collection of butterflies and trap-door spiders and other insects in my 'Buggery,' as Norman calls it. When I showed him all the data I had collected from text-books and encyclopædias about the insect and plant life of the desert, and all the notes I had made myself from my own observations, he actually whistled with surprise. He sat

and fired questions at me like a Gatling gun for nearly an hour, winding up by asking me if I had any idea what a valuable collection I had made, and if I would be willing to part with it.

"Then it came out that he is a noted naturalist who is preparing a set of books on insects and their relation to plant life, and is spending a year in the West on purpose to study the varieties here. Some of my specimens are so rare he has not come across them before, and he said my notes would save him weeks of time — in fact, would be like a blazed trail through a wilderness, showing him where to go to verify my observations without loss of time.

"Of course, when it comes to the pinch, I *don't* want to part with my beautiful collection of specimens. It means a great deal to me; I was over four years making it. But it is too great an opportunity to let pass. He is to name the price to-morrow after he has made a careful estimate, so I don't know how much he will offer, but Mrs. Levering says it is sure to be far more than an inexperienced teacher or stenographer could earn in a whole summer.

"How I have worried and fretted and fumed because I had no way to make money here! Now besides what I get for my specimens I am to have a

chance to earn a little more. Professor Carnes will be here till cold weather, and since I can give him 'intelligent assistance,' as he calls it, he will have work for me in connection with his notes, copying and indexing them, and gathering new material.

"Now you can go back to saving up for your year abroad, and give the family the honour of claiming *one* member with a career. Jack is really going back to the office the first of September for a part of every day, at quite a respectable salary considering the length of time he will work. He's too valuable a man to the company for them to part with. As for me, I'm *sure* something else will turn up as soon as my work for Professor Carnes comes to an end. We Wares can look back over so many *Eben-Ezers* raised to mark some special time when Providence came to our rescue, that we have no right ever to be discouraged again. Professor Carnes is my last one, though nobody would be more astonished than he to know that he is regarded in the light of an old Israelitish Memorial stone. You will not have such frequent letters from me after this, as I shall be so busy. But Jack says he will attend to my correspondence. He is beginning to write a little every day. Yesterday he wrote to Betty. He has enjoyed her letters so much, telling

about her lovely time up in the Maine woods. I am so glad you are to have a vacation, too. So no more at present from your happy little sister."

Like all people who are limited to one hobby, and who pursue one line of study for years regardless of other interests, Professor Carnes took little notice of anything outside of his especial work. If Mary had been a new kind of bug he would have studied her with profound interest, spending days in learning her peculiarities, and sparing no pains in classifying her and assigning her to the place she occupied in the great plan of creation. But being only a human being she attracted his attention only so far as she contributed to the success of his work.

He would go tramping through the woods wherever she led, only vaguely aware of the fact that she had enlisted half a dozen small boys in her service, and that she was turning them into enthusiastic young naturalists before his very eyes. She was not doing this consciously, however. Her motive for inviting them on these expeditions, was simply to include Norman and his friends in her own enjoyment of the summer woods. It was so easy to turn each excursion into a picnic, to build a fire near some spring and set out a simple lunch that seemed a feast of the gods to voracious boyish appetites.

The goodly smell of corn, roasting in the ashes, or fresh fish sizzling on hot stones gave a charm to the learning of wood-lore that it never could have possessed otherwise. At first with the heedlessness of city-bred boys, they crashed through the underbrush with unseeing eyes, and unhearing ears, but it was not long until they had learned the alertness of young Indians, following by signs of bark and leaf and fallen feather, trails more interesting than any detective story.

Gradually the old professor, aroused to the fact that they were valuable assistants, began to take some notice of them. They awakened memories of his own barefooted boyhood, and sometimes when he had had a particularly successful morning, he threw off his habitual abstraction, and as Mary reported to Jack, was "as human as anybody."

It seemed, too, that at these times he saw Mary in a new light; saw her as the boys did, fearless as one of themselves, tireless as a squaw, and a happy-go-lucky comrade who could turn the most ordinary occasion into a jolly outing. Her knack of inventing substitutes when he had left some necessary article at home filled him with mild wonder. He came to believe that her resources were unlimited.

One morning, early in September, he forgot his

memorandum book and pencil, and did not discover the fact until he was ready to note some measurements which he could not trust to memory. It was no matter, she assured him cheerfully, as he stood peering helplessly around over his spectacles and slapping his pockets in vain.

"You know Lysander says, 'Where the lion's skin will not reach it must be pieced with the fox's.' I'll find some kind of a substitute for your pencil, somewhere."

After a few moments' absence she came up the hill again with some broad sycamore leaves which she laid on a flat rock. "There!" she exclaimed. "You dictate, and I'll write on these leaves with a hair-pin. Hazel Lee and I used to write notes on them by the hour, playing post-office, back at the Wigwam."

Several times during the dictation he looked at her as if about to make some personal remark, then changed his mind. What he had to say needed more explanation than he felt equal to making, and he decided to send Mrs. Levering as his spokesman. Being a relative, she understood the situation he wanted to make plain, and he felt she could deal with the subject better than he. So that afternoon, Mrs. Levering came over on his errand. Mrs.

Ware and Mary were sewing, and she plunged at once into her story.

Professor Carnes had been left the guardian of a fifteen-year-old niece, who was born into the world with a delicate constitution, an unhappy disposition and the proverbial gold spoon in her mouth as far as finances were concerned. The poor professor felt that he had been left with something worse than a white elephant on his hands, for he knew absolutely nothing about girls, and Marion, with her morbid, super-sensitive temperament, was a constant puzzle to him. She had been in a convent school until recently. But now her physicians advised that she be taken out and sent to some place in the country where she could lead an active outdoor life for an entire year. They recommended a climate similar to the one at Lone-Rock.

The Professor could make arrangements for her to board in Doctor Gray's family, quite near the Wares, and felt that she would be well taken care of there, physically, but he recognized the necessity of providing for her in other ways. She had no resources of her own for entertainment, and he knew she would fret herself into a decline unless some means were provided to interest and amuse her. He had been wonderfully impressed with Mary's ability

to make the best of every situation, and after he had once been awakened to the fact that she was an unusual specimen of humanity, had studied her carefully. Now he confided to Mrs. Levering his greatest desire for Marion was that she might grow up to be as self reliant and happy-hearted a young girl as Mary.

Seeing how she had aroused such a love for nature study in the boys, he felt that she might do the same for Marion. It was really a marvel, Mrs. Levering insisted, how she had bewitched both her Carl and Tommy Seldon. They were in a fair way to become as great cranks as the old professor himself. Now this was the proposition he wanted to make. That Mary should take the place of teachers and text-books, for awhile, and devote herself to the task of making Marion forget herself and her imaginary grievances; to interest her in wood-lore to the extent of making her willing to spend much time out of doors, and to imbue her if possible with some of the cheerful philosophy that made the entire Ware family such delightful companions.

"Of course," explained Mrs. Levering, "he understands that one could never be adequately repaid for such a service. It would be worth more than

any course at college or any fortune, to Marion, if she could be changed from a listless, unhappy girl to one like yourself. She will tax your ingenuity and require infinite tact and patience, but he feels that you can do more for her than any older person, because she needs healthy, young companionship more than anything else in the world. If you will devote your mornings to her, trying to attain the result he wants in any way you see fit, he will gladly pay you anything in reason. Just let me take back word that you will consider his offer and he will be over here post-haste to make terms with you."

Mary looked inquiringly across at her mother, too bewildered by this sudden prospect of such good fortune, to answer for herself, but Mrs. Ware consented immediately. "I think it a very fortunate arrangement for both girls. There is no one near Mary's age in Lone-Rock, and I have been dreading the winter for her on that account. I am sure she can make a real friend and companion out of Marion, and I can say this for my little girl, it will never be dull for anybody who follows her trail through life."

Mrs. Levering rose to go. "Then it's as good as settled. I'm sure the poor old professor will

feel that you've taken a great burden off his shoulders, and that this will be the most profitable year's education that Marion will ever have."

Hardly had their visitor departed, when Mrs. Ware was seized around the waist by a young cyclone that waltzed her through the kitchen, down the garden walk and out to the shade of the tree where Jack sat reading in his wheeled chair. "Tell him, mamma," Mary demanded, breathless and panting. "I'm too happy for words. Then call in the neighbours, and sing the Doxology!"

Later, as she and Jack sat discussing the situation with a zest which left no phase of it untouched, he said teasingly, "You needn't be pluming yourself complacently over all those compliments. Do you realize when all's said and done, they've asked nothing more of you than simply to put on cap and bells and play the jester awhile for that girl's benefit?"

"I don't care," retorted Mary. "I'm not proud, and I can stand the motley as long as it brings in the ducats. It isn't the career I had planned, but —"

She broke off abruptly, and began hunting for her spool of thread which had rolled off into the grass. When she found it she stitched away in

silence as if she had forgotten her unfinished sentence.

"What career *did* you have planned, little sister?" asked Jack, gently, when the silence had lasted a long time. She looked up with a start as if her thoughts had been far away, then said with a deprecatory smile, "I hardly know myself, Jack. I don't mind confessing to you, though I couldn't to any one else, it was so big I couldn't see the top of it."

With her eyes bent on her sewing she told him about the Voice and the Vision that had come to her when she looked up at Edryn's Window for the first time, and how she had been wondering ever since what great duty it was with which she was to keep tryst some day.

"I can always tell *you* things without fear of being laughed at," she ended, "so I don't mind saying that I believed at the time, it really was the King's Call, and that some great destiny, oh far greater than Joyce's or Betty's awaited me. It seemed so real I don't see how I could have been mistaken, and yet — now — it *does* seem foolish for me to aspire so high. Doesn't it?"

There was a little break in her voice although she ended with a laugh. Jack watched the brown

head bent over her sewing for several minutes before he replied. Then he said in a grave kind tone that Mary always liked, because it seemed so intimate and as if he regarded her as his own age, "Since I've been hurt, I've done a lot of thinking, and I've come to the conclusion that the highest thing a man can aspire to, and the blessedest, is 'to ease the burden of the world.' Either consciously or unconsciously that is what every artist does who paints a master-piece. He helps us bear our troubles by making us forget them — at least, as long as the uplift and the inspiration stay with us. Every author and musician whose work lives, does the same. Every inventor who creates something to make toil easier, and life happier, eases that burden to a degree.

"So I don't think you were mistaken about that call. Your achievement *may* be greater than the other girls, even here in Lone-Rock, as much bigger and better, as a whole life is bigger and better than a few books and pictures. You've begun on me, and you'll have Marion to try your hand on next. No telling where you will stop. You may be the Apostle of Cheerfulness to the entire far West before you are done. Who knows?"

Although the last words were spoken lightly,

Mary felt the seriousness underlying them, and looked up, her face shining, as if some mystery had suddenly been made clear to her.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried. "You don't know how easy that makes every thing. I've looked at life at Lone-Rock as something to be endured merely as a stepping stone to better things. But if you think that this is the beginning of my real tryst, I can answer the call in such a different spirit. "By the wingèd spur of our ancestors," she cried, gaily waving the ruffle she was hemming, "I'll be 'Ready, aye ready' for whatever comes."

Jack did not go back to the office the first of September. It was the middle of the month before he made the attempt. Norman wheeled him over on his way to school, and Mary, standing in the door to watch them start, felt the tears spring to her eyes as she compared this pitiful going to the buoyant stride with which he used to start to work. Still, he was so much better than they had dared to hope he would be, that when she went back to her room she picked up a red pencil and marked the date on her calendar with a star.

Then she remembered that this was the day the girls would be trooping back to Warwick Hall, and she recalled the opening day the year before, when

she had been among them. She wondered who was taking possession of her room, and if the new girls would be as devoted to Betty as the old ones were. She could picture them all, driving up the avenue, singing as they came; then Hawkins's imposing reception and Madam Chartley's greeting. How she longed to be in the bustle of unpacking, and to make the rounds of all her favourite haunts by the river and in the beautiful old garden! Dorene and Cornie wouldn't be there. They were graduated and gone. But Elsie and A.O. and Margaret Elwood and Betty — as she named them over such a homesick pang seized her, that it seemed as if she could not bear the thought of never going back.

The thought of all she was missing, drove her as it used to do, to her shadow-chum for sympathy, and Lloyd was in her thoughts all day. Somehow, when Huldah came back from the grocery, bringing her a letter from Lloyd, she was not at all surprised, although it was the first one she had received from her since she left school, except a little note of sympathy right after Jack's accident.

The surprise came when she opened the letter. She read it over and over, and then, because Jack was at the office and her mother at a neighbour's,

she turned to her long-neglected journal for a confidante. She had to hunt through all the drawers of her desk for it, it had been hidden away so long. She felt that the news in the letter was worthy a place in her good times book, for it recorded Lloyd's happiness, which was as dear to her as her own.

"Oh, little Red Book," she wrote, "what an amazing secret I am going to give you to hold! *Lloyd is engaged, and not to Phil!* She has been engaged since last June to Rob Moore. It is not to be announced formally until Christmas, and they are not to be married for a long time, but Eugenia knows, and Joyce, and her very most intimate friends. She wanted me to know, and to hear it from herself, because she felt that no one could wish her joy more sincerely than her *'little chum.'* I am so glad she really called me that, after all my months of make believe.

"But it was the surprise of my life to find that Rob is The Prince and not Phil. Poor Phil! I am sure he was disappointed, and somehow I keep thinking of that more than of Lloyd's happiness. I don't see how she *could* prefer anybody else to the Best Man."

Here she paused, and began fingering the un-

written leaves of the diary, wondering if the time would ever come when they would hold the record of other engagements. Nearly a third of the pages were still blank. How many nice things she could think of that she would like to be able to write thereon. Maybe they would hold the date of a visit to Oaklea some day, to *Mrs. Rob Moore.* How odd that sounded. Or what was more probable, since he had already mentioned it in his letters to Jack, a visit from Phil, if he went back to California with his father and Elsie on their return.

And maybe, it might hold the news of Joyce's engagement, some day, or Betty's, and maybe — some far, far-off day, it might hold her own! That seemed a very unlikely thing just now. Princes were an unknown quantity in Lone-Rock. And yet — she looked dreamily away across the hills — there were the words of that song:

"And if he come not by the road, and come not by the hill,
And come not by the far seaway, yet come he surely will.
Close all the roads of all the world, love's road is open still."

Seizing her pen, she wrote just below her last entry, "It is five months since that dismal day on the train, when I closed the record in this book, as

I thought, forever, and wrote after the last of my good times, *The End.* But it wasn't that at all, and now, no matter how dark the outlook may be after this, I shall *never* believe that I have reached the end to happiness."

THE END.

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